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DIRECT ACTION

BY

WILLIAM MELLOR

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TO
H. E. M.

INTRODUCTION

ONE of the commonest of sayings nowadays among both employers and workers is, "Things cannot go on as they are. There must be a smash." Everywhere men and women are conscious of living in times of revolutionary change, and everywhere they wait expectantly for the crisis. All the countries in which Capitalism holds sway are rapidly being divided into hostile camps—on the one side stand those who seek to preserve the world as it is, on the other those who seek to destroy and, after destroying, to re-create. Midway between these warring sections there are groups that either do not understand, or dare not face, the meaning of this appearance of war. They cannot, or will not, believe that all hope of peace has gone, and they fear the inevitable suffering that open war brings in its train. Their position is one of insecurity for every day brings further proof of their isolation. They find themselves thrown this way and that in the struggle for supremacy;

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they are, in very 'deed, being ground between the upper and nether millstones. In a world which is marked by the existence of deep social unrest, they find themselves vainly "incriminating 'Peace, Peace'"—when there is, and can be, no peace until the struggle between those who own and those who are owned is settled for all time. Unless one is prepared to regard the world from this point of view, there can be no real appreciation of what is taking place, and no real appreciation of what is to happen in the future. The old order of civilisation is decaying and a new one, rising out of the old, is being prepared. The world has come to the cross-roads, and the contest over "the right of way" has been joined.

It is the purpose of this book to explain the meaning and implications of the way in which this contest is being fought out, and, in particular, to urge that the struggle for supremacy is concerned primarily with the economic facts of life, that the prize that accompanies victory is, for the one side, the preservation of the *status quo*, and, for the other, a new social order based not on the struggle for existence, but on the

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idea of mutual service of all to all. Social unrest is but the symptom of a deep underlying disease from which civilisation suffers; it is a sign that the circumstances of life deny to some what freely they afford to others; it is a proof that injustice is being meted out. In short, the continued growth of social unrest arises from a realisation of social inequalities, and from a desire on the part of those upon whom these inequalities fall to redress the balance. There is a war in progress between those who have and would continue to hold and those who have not and desire to possess.

The struggle of the classes has two sides: it is a struggle for social equality, for the abolition of all economic distinctions between man and man, and it is a struggle for the right of every individual to express himself in the work he does, for the right to labour not for the benefit of an employer, but for the well-being and happiness of one's fellows. The struggle finds its expression on the economic field, for on that field is to be found the basis of all life. Bread and butter are the fundamentals of all existence, and a world in which the supplies of bread

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and butter are unfairly distributed is a world marked by social injustice and social inequality. This fundamental economic inequality affects every sphere of life, and eventuates in a world whose people are sharply divided in morality, in methods of life, in outlook and in speech. It produces, within a society, two classes—the one leisured and cultured, free from economic care and worry; the other condemned to a lifelong struggle to sustain animal existence, pressed by fear of starvation, living the drab existence of a beast of burden. It produces a race of masters and a race of slaves. More and more as Capitalism develops the segregation of these classes is affected, and the continued free development of “big business” can only entl. in the absolute division of mankind into machine-minders and machine-owners. Such a world is the apotheosis of Capitalism and the burial-ground of freedom. • •

Fortunately for the world there is no free and unhampered development of Capitalism. The wage-slaves are everywhere questioning the divine right of their masters. They are seeking for a new basis of life, and blunder-

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ingly, but surely, are working for a change that shall destroy for ever that power of man over man that springs from the possession of property. The under-world is in a state of unrest, and it is striving to throw off the chains that weigh it down. That throwing-off is in process the world over, and in no country is Capitalism left unchallenged. The world is in revolt, and the weapons used to consummate that revolt are economic. Direct Action is the watch-word of both those who defend and those who attack.

This, at least, is the point of view I hold, and it is with a desire to explain to those who are opposed to me, and to help those who agree, that I have written this little book.¹ My hopes lie with all the countless millions the world over who are striving to create out of the chaos of the old a new world, free from injustice, economic slavery, and unmerited suffering.

W. M.

September 1920.

¹ My thanks are due to Miss Torr and W. Holmes, of "The Daily Herald" staff, for the help they have given me.

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DIRECT ACTION

I

WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION?

'DIRECT Action can, in a general way, be defined as the use of some form of economic power for the securing of ends desired by those who possess that power. Taken in this general sense it is merely another name, when employed by the workers, for the strike, when used by the employers, for the lock-out. It is an attempt on the part of the workers or of the employers to extract advantages for themselves by their control over the economic life of society.

A section of the working class desires, let us say, an increase of a penny an hour or the shortening of its working week. These members of the working class rely for the securing of their ends upon the strength of their Trade Union, whose object it is to give them control over the commodity,

labour power, that they sell in order to live. They are confronted by the economic power that belongs to the owners of the machinery of production by the very fact of that ownership. The demand for higher wages or shorter hours resolves itself into a struggle between these two forms of economic power, and the final form of that struggle is the refusal of one or other of the contending parties to allow industry to continue. That refusal is expressed by the workers through the strike, by ca' canny, or some form of sabotage; it is expressed by the employers through the lock-out or through some less dramatic, but at the same time effective, cutting off of supplies. Trusts and cartels, combinations and agreements are all forms of direct action used by the employing class, and their object, as the object of the Trade Unions, is to secure ends that seem to those concerned desirable and worth obtaining.

Against direct action which seeks ends that are not likely to threaten the structure of Capitalism itself, very little criticism is raised. The history of the hundred years of Trade Unionism and of the last hundred years of Capitalist development is the history

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of the greater acceptance by "the community" of the idea that an employer has the right, in combination with other employers, to refuse to continue his business except on his own terms, and that the workers have an equal right to refuse to sell their labour power on terms that they deem unsatisfactory. The strike for higher wages or shorter hours is, to-day regarded as perfectly legitimate, if not justifiable, and a whole series of laws has been passed to enable the Trade Unions to engage in this particular form of direct action. The Trades Disputes Acts constitute the charter of the working class under Capitalism, and establish its right, in the eyes of the law and of all "respectable" people, to withdraw its labour in a concerted and coherent manner. That right and that charter have been won only by dint of the workers refusing to be content with anything less. They have had to fight for the legal recognition of the ordinary reformist strike, and having won that particular fight, they are expected to remain content. A hundred years ago it was a conspiracy in the eyes of the law for men to combine together to secure higher wages

or shorter hours. To-day it is a conspiracy for men to combine together to secure the ownership of the mines for the nation. Every argument that has been used against the wage strike is now being used against the strike that seeks radically to alter the conditions under which the workers live. The strike has always been a revolutionary instrument, in that it has challenged in a practical way the right of the employer "to do what he likes with his own," but, hitherto, it has been employed only to ameliorate the conditions of wage slavery; it has not been directed against wage slavery itself. The question that every one, both workers and employers, is asking to-day, is whether or not the workers of any country, or of the world, are justified in using their economic power to change the system of society under which they live.

The answer to this question depends largely upon the view of society that one holds. To those who see in society a gradually unfolding "organism," whose parts are indissolubly linked, and possessed of a life greater than the lives of the separate parts, the use of direct action by one section of

the community in order to dispossess another section must of necessity seem immoral and unjustifiable. To those who regard society as a battleground for contending economic powers, the use of direct action for revolutionary ends will appear not only justifiable, but as the only method of solving the problems of life. If society and if "the community" are possessed of a unity greater than the diversities and differences of their component parts, then all efforts should be made to preserve that unity. But if the underlying fact of society is the existence of differences and divisions, and if the forms that society takes at any particular moment are the reflection of those differences and divisions, then it becomes essential that those differences and divisions should be brought to a crisis and solved by the final success of one section or the other. The particular form taken by society at a given time is either the reflex of the struggle of its various elements for power and control, or it is the result of a gradual unfolding of an "organism" possessed of real social consciousness and social unity. If one takes the first point of view, then naturally and inevitably direct action

becomes not only one of the weapons to be employed in the struggle, but actually the primary one; if one takes the latter point of view, any form of action that disturbs the underlying harmony of society must be condemned.

The fundamental fact of civilisation to-day, as I see it, is the struggle of economically powerful sections for the right to govern, and control those who are economically weaker. Every community in which Capitalism holds sway is divided roughly into two classes—those who have to sell their power to labour in order to live and those who are enabled to purchase that power through their control over the means of life. The object and desire of those who sell, is to get in the open market as high a price as may be for the commodity they have to offer; the object of those who buy is to purchase that commodity at the lowest possible figure. It is not here a case of the interests of those who buy and of those who sell being identical, but a case in which those interests are directly and fundamentally opposed. If a man wants to sell an article for a sovereign, and finds that the purchaser is not prepared to pay

more than ten shillings, and if to sell at a sovereign is the only way in which the seller can secure sufficient upon which to live, then the purchaser who offers ten shillings is not a friend, but a foe. The desire of the seller is to compel the purchaser to pay his price. If the purchaser cannot continue unless he gets control of the article that is offered for sale, then he will pay the price demanded, but if he can continue he will hold up the purchase until the seller, for economic reasons, is forced to part with the commodity at less than he desires to take. The seller in society to-day is the worker; the buyer is the Capitalist. The seller is deprived of any and all forms of property, save the property inherent in his readiness and willingness to work; the buyer possesses property which depends for its development on his power to purchase the willingness of human beings to apply their labour to his possessions. One wants to buy, the other wants to sell, and the place where they meet is the open market. Were the sale an isolated sale in a world where only the actual buyer and the actual seller existed, the two interests would be, if not

identical, at any rate closely allied. There would be one article for sale and one purchaser, and the purchase price would be fixed by the desire of the seller to dispose of his commodity and the desire of the purchaser to buy. Unfortunately for the workers there are more articles for sale than there are people willing to buy, and the result of this is that the selling price of the commodity, labour power, is beaten down to the level of subsistence.

If one compares the price of a worker in the labour market with, say, the price of a pound of cheese in a grocer's shop, it can be seen how infinitely superior the position of the cheese is to that of the worker. The supply of cheese is limited, and the price is governed by the existence of combinations controlling that supply. The housewife cannot refuse to buy cheese at ninepence a pound in the hope of getting it for fourpence in the next shop. That sort of thing does not happen. But in the labour market that is exactly the sort of thing that does happen. The price of a worker varies from district to district, and still more from country to country, in proportion as the

supply is plentiful and the organisation weak. Given a thousand workers after a thousand and one jobs, the price for their labour power will be higher than it would be were there the same thousand workers and only nine hundred and ninety-nine jobs. The existence in the labour market of more people wanting work than there is work quite inevitably reduces the price they get for selling themselves. Labour, unlike cheese, is in normal times practically unlimited, and even if the supply of one country fails, there is always the possibility of falling back upon the supplies available in other parts of the world.

This may sound an extravagant comparison, but any fair analysis of the facts of Capitalism will show its truth. If I am an engineer desirous of obtaining work, and there is a scarcity of the particular class of labour in which I am skilled, then there is no question but that I shall be able to get pretty nearly the price I put upon my labour power. That was the case during the European War. There was a greater demand for the skilled engineers than there was supply. Had it not been for the exist-

ence of the Munitions Act, the price of labour power could, theoretically, have been forced up indefinitely. But if when I offer myself as an engineer I find that there are five other engineers likewise offering themselves, it follows that the price given for my labour power will suffer through the existence of these other five men equally anxious to sell themselves. The employer, taking advantage, necessarily and rightly from his point of view, of the surplus of labour in the market, will hire that man who is prepared to sell at the lowest price. That lowest price is fixed more or less by the cost of subsistence, because it would not pay an employer to buy at a price that inevitably reduces the capacity of the worker to labour, nor would it pay a worker to sell at a price that would result in his capacity to labour being at once deteriorated. The struggle in the open market over the price to be paid for the labour of human beings is the bedrock foundation of Capitalism. Every capitalist depends for his existence upon there being more workers after jobs than there are jobs for workers, and the pool of unemployed is the safeguard of private enterprise.

Consciousness of this fundamental fact is the reason for the existence of Trade Unions. They represent an attempt on the part of the sellers of a certain type of commodity to create a ring or corner in that commodity. They represent the effort on the part of the working class to overcome the inevitable results that spring from the superfluity of "hands" and a restricted market in which those "hands" can be employed. The Trade Unions rose in order to prevent the competitive buying and selling of labour power from reducing the workers to a position of absolute slavery; but the power of the Trade Unions to effect this purpose is conditioned by the wage system, with its fixation of the prime cost of labour power at the cost of subsistence. The alternative that faces the worker who dislikes the idea of selling himself to an employer is starvation. And the capacity of a Trade Union, however well organised, to force up the price of the commodity it controls is conditioned by the extent to which those who compose the Trade Unions are prepared to face that starvation. The employer when purchasing the commodity that does not need to be

fed, or the man who sells a commodity that is in no danger of starving, is in a stronger economic position than the Trade Union which is attempting to dispose of a commodity that is liable to die, or the worker who is selling his labour power in order that his body may be kept alive. The brutal fact of present-day society is that those who purchase labour power trade upon the need of keeping body and soul together which forms the predominant desire of every human being. The paradise for Capitalism is the country in which there are fewer jobs than men and the country in which there has been no attempt at combination of the workers to raise their standard of living. The paradise for the wage-slave is the country where there are more jobs than men and where labour is organised to the Nth power, whilst capital remains unco-ordinated and uncombined.

Any one looking round the world to-day will see that neither the worker nor the employer is likely to reach his paradise. On both sides there is organisation of a kind, and in every country the tendency is for the supply of workers greatly to exceed

the number of jobs. This latter fact, coupled with the organisation of the employers, inevitably gives to them the whip hand so long as the system exists under which men and women have to go into the open market in order that they may live. The struggle for higher wages on the part of the workers is, in short, foredoomed to failure under the conditions which at present obtain. Every nominal advance obtained through their organisations is taken away through the power possessed by the Capitalist to control prices and, by means of this control, to rule the world. Faced with this, it is difficult, to say the least, to maintain that the salient fact of modern civilisation is the fact of social unity. It is, indeed, not only difficult, but manifestly absurd.

The problem of the future is how to solve this struggle, that inevitably exists when that section of the people known as the working class has only the choice between starvation and the sale of its power to labour. No amount of sympathy for the poor or Christian charity can overcome the fact that an employer would be an idiot who did not get his labour power as cheaply

as he could, and the worker would be a fool who did not sell that power at the highest possible price; nor can any amount of sympathy or charity overcome the inevitable result of the desire for cheapness on the one hand and the claim for a high selling price on the other—the result is war. This war is rightly and properly termed 'the Class War; and is the struggle between those who have economic power, and as a consequence control politics, and those who are striving to achieve that economic power which will give them the control of all the machinery and instruments of civilised life. It is a war that is being fought out in every workshop, in every pit, and in every factory; it is a war that finds its reflex on the political field and that governs and controls all legislation and all social activities.

The main facts of the division of society which accompanies the wage system are two. In the first place, the great majority of people are condemned to an existence that holds out to them very little possibility of leisure or happiness. In the second place, they are compelled, by the struggle, to forgo any possibility of being able to control the processes

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of production, and thereby of expressing their own individuality in the work they do, for once a man has sold his labour power to an employer he has signed away any control over the way in which that labour power is to be employed: he has ceased to be a man and has become a machine.

The wage system finds expression, then, in the existence of a working class subsisting on wages fixed on the fodder basis, save for their Trade Unions economically powerless, and deprived of any control over the methods and purposes to which their labour power is put.

The Class War arises from the fact of economic distinctions and will disappear with the disappearance of those economic distinctions. It can only be waged on the economic field, and the power of a section of the community to achieve any change, whether that section be composed of employers or workers, depends upon its power to prevent the smooth running of the economic life of the community. Politics and the results of political action are merely the reflex expression of economic interests and economic struggles. The vote is the

symbol that the dominant economic class has had to recognise the existence of a growing economic power, and it is given not as the result of a spirit of liberalism, or because of a belief in democracy, but through fear. The workers of Great Britain have won their political advancement because of their enhanced solidarity on the economic field. Take from them their economic strength and the vote becomes utterly useless.

It is, I know, a common thing to-day to affirm that changes are accomplished through the power of the vote, but those who make these assertions do so because they have never really looked at the underlying facts of life. It is amusing, too, to notice that the chief defenders of political action as a method of securing radical and drastic changes in the organisation of society are often men who draw what political power they have direct from the economic organisations they represent. Take, for instance, men like J. H. Thomas. He represents in Parliament the constituency of Derby, but he is listened to, and draws what power he has, from the fact that behind him stands

the economic power of the National Union of Railwaymen, whose members are scattered throughout every constituency in the British Isles. He represents, in so far as the fact of his being a member of Parliament effects anything, not a well-defined geographical area, but a well-defined economic unit. Only in so far as the things he stands for have, the backing and the power of this economic organisation can he achieve anything, however small it be. And so with every other Labour member. They go to Parliament to try to put on the Statute Book measures that express desires and aspirations that have behind them the driving force not of a politically disunited class, but of an industrially conscious section of the community. Take away from them the power to call to their aid the economic forces of their organisations, and they become ineffective prattlers. Assure to them the backing of the economic organisation of labour, and they possess the possibility of changing the face of the world.

The discussion that centres round the relative merits of political and industrial action as the means of achieving the change

from wage slavery to Communism has tended to take the form of an attempt to decide which is the weapon to use. Conducted on these lines it is futile and barren, for it overlooks the obvious fact that, since the struggle between the classes is economic, the force that can secure victory must itself employ economic means. Political action stands as the handmaiden of economic power, and its effectiveness is to be judged in proportion as it expresses, in one field of human activity, the claims put forward by a part of the community on the basic field. Political action registers desires expressed on the economic battleground.

Parliament to-day is not a place in which disinterested citizens settle the problems of society according to theoretical presuppositions, with the sole object of securing justice for all, but a place in which economically powerful groups strive to secure a victory. Victory ultimately goes to that group which is best organised, not inside Parliament, but inside the workshops and on the Stock Exchange. The banks are secured against loss on the outbreak of a great war, not because the shareholders and directors have

votes, but because they have the power, by withholding supplies, to bring starvation down upon the country. Engineering workers secure modifications of the Munitions Act because they have the power of preventing munitions of war from being made. The coal-owners prevent nationalisation just in so far as their control over the mines is greater than the control of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. A clever politician is a man who can rightly appraise the strength of varying economic forces engaged in the class struggle, and can translate that correct appraisal into terms of legislative enactment.

Where then lies the power of these opposing economic forces? In the case of the employers, their power comes from their possession of the fruits of the work of Labour during the past centuries. They own the means of production, and they are able, if they so desire, to prevent those means of production from being utilised. The power of the working class lies in its Trade Unions, which are organisations designed to create a monopoly of labour and to prevent the full effects of the struggle for existence

from being felt. Stripped of all outward decencies the world to-day stands forth as the battleground of contending economic powers. Round the struggle, intended to conceal the effects of the struggle, has grown up a whole paraphernalia, a whole series of political organisations, whose supporters pretend to be engaged in seeking the good of the State. The whole function of these organisations is to obscure the real facts. Behind and above all this semblance of parliamentary government and political representation lies the fact of the struggle between those who possess and those who are possessed. The Class War is the expression of the existence in every capitalist society of two contending sections engaged in waging an economic war and necessarily compelled to use in the waging of that war weapons that are economic. Politics, rightly understood, is but an expression of this economic contest. It does not stand on its own, nor is it capable itself of solving the riddle that Capitalism has set.

II

AN OPEN WAR

DIRECTLY one comes to examine the actual working out of the class struggle in our own country the inevitability of that appeal to force which culminates in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat becomes clear. So long as the demands put forward by the workers do not threaten the existence of the present system of production, the harsher side of the methods used to obtain concessions is somewhat obscured. The appeal to direct action as expressed in movements for higher wages and shorter hours, though the only method which can win those concessions, is never carried to extreme lengths. Within the Capitalist class there are always good employers who recognise that it will pay to treat their human machines decently, that there is an economy of "high wages," and that it is to their ultimate interest not to accentuate this phase of the struggle. And as long as they can pass on

the increases by additions to the price of the commodities they sell, without enraging the mass of the consumers, this policy of recognising Trade Unions and arriving at compromises works. Directly the whole mass of the workers begins, as a mass, to demand a better standard of life, and refuses to allow "the extra charge on industry" to be passed on; this method of compromise fails, and the appeal to naked force has to be made.

This position has been reached as a result of the "Great War" in practically every European country. There is a universal demand that the distribution of the world's products shall be on a more equitable basis, and a universal determination that this more equitable distribution shall not menace the price of commodities. The workers have grown weary of living through taking in each other's washing! This weariness means for the Capitalist interests one thing, and one thing only—an attack upon their profits; it means an attack upon the whole system of production. To meet this immediate steps are taken, and to-day no section of employers settles a wage demand without consultation with the rest of the employers. The struggle

for wages has become a matter of concern for all the owners, for a "concession" made to one section of workers means an immediate demand by another section for a similar concession. Only by a concerted policy can this general movement bewarded off, and that concerted policy has been adopted. The formation of the Federation of British Industries marked a definite stage in the class struggle. It was in effect a declaration of class consciousness from the owners and a challenge to the workers. To this challenge there was only one possible response—if the system of profit-making is incompatible with an equitable distribution of the world's wealth, then the system must go. The ordinary "man in the street" by force of circumstances finds himself fighting in alliance with the Communist, though had one called him a Communist he would have been gravely insulted. All he knows, and cares, is that his wages do not keep pace with the cost of living, and knowing that, he demands a change—what that change must be the Communists alone have made clear.

Coincident with this quickening of the

class struggle through the continual depression of real wages comes the failure of Capitalism "to produce the goods." Every nation that took part in the Great War, with the possible exception of America, stands to-day face to face with bankruptcy: expenditure exceeds income; losses are made good by loans that still further increase the losses; the printing presses work at high pressure to produce paper, and the condition of the world steadily grows worse. The panacea for this, according to the Capitalist philosophy, is "production and still production." The workers are attacked for "ca' cannying," they are criticised for refusing to work under a system of "Prussianism," they are lectured for demanding more wages or shorter hours. But the workers pay little heed to these frantic appeals. And rightly so. They want to know who is to profit by increased production; they ask why they should produce more in order to make greater and greater profits for somebody else; they ask why they who have suffered under the system should now turn round and save it. True the machine is breaking down, but what is needed is not the

old machine patched up, but a new one of a different design and make. Capitalism has completed its mission, and, if the world is to be saved, Capitalism must go.

The practical application of this revolt is to be seen in the demand by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain that the mines should belong to the nation and be controlled by the miners. A million workers have, through their representatives, declared that they are not prepared to go on producing coal under a system that extracts profits and royalties from their labour; they are not prepared to see the industry any longer controlled by a few in the interests of a few. They claim that, as workers, they have the right to certain conditions of work which will mean greater safety in working and more leisure and opportunity for themselves and their families. These claims can only be met by the institution of a new system of production, and they insist that this shall be done. Here the issue is clear and it has been raised in a practical form. How will it be fought out? The deciding factor will be the amount of economic force the two parties—the miners and the mine-owners—can bring

to bear on the State. It is not a question of what is just or right. It is simply a question of whether it is better to have coal on the miners' conditions or to go without. I am not concerned with the question of whether the miners' terms are in the long run the right ones from the point of view of Communism—they may or may not be—what matters is that they are the miners' terms. The struggle is economic, and it will be settled in the economic field. It may be that the force wielded by the mine-owners and by the threatened interests of other Capitalists will, in the first round, succeed in defeating the miners. It may be that this section of workers will for the moment be forced to accept less than its terms. If that happens it does not destroy, rather it strengthens, the whole case for direct action; it proves that the economic power of the Miners' Federation was not equal to that of combined capital, but it proves, too, that it was the economic power of combined Capitalism that caused the miners to be defeated. Momentary defeat for the miners will simply involve the enlargement of the sphere of operations, and will bring the struggle to a

head in other industries. The miners cannot go back to an acceptance of the old system; the workers in other industries cannot afford to let the miners be permanently defeated, for fear of what may befall themselves; the mine-owners cannot agree to an abolition of private property in mines, because it involves their extinction; the general body of Capitalists cannot see the mine-owners defeated, because their turn will come next. Open and naked war is the result, and the weapons are economic power arising from possession of property and economic power arising from possession of a monopoly of labour power. The use of direct action by the miners is dictated to them by the facts of the situation as it is presented.

The necessity for an appeal to direct action becomes more insistent the more the object sought threatens the existence of private property. That is the real reason for the alarm caused by the miners' campaign, by the demands of the dock-workers for an inquiry into the profits made by ship-owners and others, by the amazing revelations of the deals in wool and yarn, by the gambling in cotton shares. A searchlight is being

turned upon the whole system of production, and the glare means hunger for all who depend on the system. Both sides are fighting, and the issue depends upon the economic power they wield. As I write the employers are using a new tactic. Faced with a demand for more wages, they threaten to close down and to cease production; the reason given is that it is impossible under present conditions to make a profit out of the labour of the workers. This threat to close down is the employers' final bluff in the game of direct action. The object of the bluff is obvious: through the fear of unemployment the workers are to be driven back to work on conditions that will ensure to the firm a profit for the future. Rightly viewed it marks the collapse of Capitalism. The fact that this threat has so far only operated in luxury trades will no doubt obscure its real meaning; it may even induce the workers to make promises and attempt "to save the firms." But what has happened in one case is bound to happen everywhere—employers will play the bluff in industries that are vital and essential, and in those industries Labour will not be

put off its game. Instead of releasing the pressure the workers will steadily increase it, until the only alternative is the extinction of private ownership and the running of industries for use." Direct economic pressure is the only way to make the employers cry out and to render impossible the present methods of production. That point Labour every day realises more fully; and that realisation gives to the weapon of direct action its real value as the instrument of revolution.

Elsewhere I deal with the criticisms brought against the use of direct action to secure the ending of the present forms of ownership and control; here I am concerned with the fact that the more the pressure of the workers infringes upon these forms, the clearer becomes the fact that it is economic power that tells. At home the struggle over the mines is but the beginning of the final effort of the workers to overthrow, and of the employers to preserve, a system that by its very nature produces conflict. Abroad the success of the Russian Revolution has united all far-seeing Capitalists in an effort to force their respective states to employ

direct action. That they have not succeeded as well as they could have wished is due solely to the obvious determination of great sections of the workers to use their economic power to prevent intervention. The threat of direct action by the Triple Alliance in 1919, the renewal of the threat by the Council of Action in 1920, the fear that that threat might be made good—these are the causes which have induced the British Government to cease open intervention. Direct action at home, coupled with the success of the Russian armies abroad, will effect what no amount of “good-will” could ever produce. The lesson of the Russian episode is that a general attack on Capitalism anywhere calls up Capitalism everywhere in defence, and that this general rally can only be met by a rally of all workers to the side of those engaged in the attack. To put the whole matter “in a nutshell,” the economic revolution in Russia cannot remain Russian—it must and will become world-wide. Russia to-day threatens all Capitalism, and has caused everywhere a sharpening of the hostility between the two great forces in the world—Labour on the one hand, and

on the other Capitalism. The day of conciliation and bargaining has gone—the day for open war has come not only in Russia, but in every country where Capitalism prevails. To crush Bolshevism now is the only hope for Capitalists everywhere; that they cannot crush it is due in large measure to the opposition of the workers in this and other countries—opposition expressed in terms of direct action.

III

WHAT OF DEMOCRACY?

THERE is a common argument used against the advocates of direct action which raises the whole question of Democracy. Within a country where the vote is possessed by the great bulk of the population there is no need, it is said, for a recourse to the clumsy weapon of the strike. The possession of the vote gives to the possessors the power to effect the change from private to public ownership without violence and by recognised constitutional methods. Why then attempt to set back the clock of political progress and appeal to methods that smack more of barbarism than of civilisation? Still further point is given to this criticism by the charge that those who would use direct action are running counter to the whole trend of events which gives a wider and wider control of political forces to the workers, who, by sheer weight of numbers, can, at the ballot-box, outvote the defenders

of the present system. To use direct action within a democracy amounts to an act of treason, and against it all the forces of the State must be used.

This point of view finds vigorous expression from politicians who are not desirous of ending the present system, as well as from those who stoutly claim that they are. Speaking at Criccieth in 1919, Mr. Lloyd George said: "This threat of direct action is a complete subversion of every democratic doctrine. If it ever had any justification it has none now, after the great extension of the franchise witnessed within the last couple of years. In the long run the working-classes will suffer from it." Mr. J. R. Clynes, in an article for a magazine called *Over-Seas*, gave cordial adhesion to this view, and added: "A Government could not allow any section of the electorate to put itself outside the law without using the resource of the State to require compliance with Parliamentary decisions. . . . Men can strike at Parliament at the polls, but in no other way." The philosophy behind these utterances has been put into words by Mr. J. R. MacDonald, who, in his study of

"Syndicalism," states that "any project of social reconstruction which founds itself on reality must begin with the facts of social unity, not with those of class conflict, because the former is the predominant factor in society." The same belief is expressed in another way by Viscount Haldane. In an interview on the relative merits of the Labour and Liberal Parties he laid down as axiomatic the following political philosophy: "The State is nothing more or less than all the people of the nation."

Direct Actionists challenge the whole of this theory. They deny that the possession of a vote by all the adults within a specified geographical group makes that group self-governed, and they deny that the State is an expression of the wills of all the people. With considerable bluntness they declare that those who oppose direct action for these reasons are accepting the philosophic assumptions of the Capitalists, and are erecting into the image of a God the State, which is merely part of the machinery of Capitalism. It is, they declare, dangerous to the success of the workers in the class struggle to attempt to make them believe

that democratic forms absolve them from the necessity of employing their economic power, and still more dangerous, to support the doctrine that the State stands in some way for the greatest common multiple of the wishes and desires of the citizens. There is, in short, a cleavage of philosophy and outlook, and that cleavage explains both the advocacy and the criticism of direct action. Let us examine the argument against direct action that arises because of a belief that a country is democratic. The first question that has to be faced is, "What is democracy?" For lack of a better definition we will take the old one made famous by Abraham Lincoln, and say that democracy is "government of the people, by the people, for the people." The great part of the life of a people is spent at work. Unless the principle enunciated by Lincoln runs in the workshops it is useless to expect it to exist elsewhere, for the whole of a man's life depends ultimately upon the sort of existence he leads whilst at work. No one will maintain by any stretch of the imagination that modern industry can be called "democratic": it is sheer autocracy, tempered

by the power of Trade Unionism. There is no pretence made of "government of the workers, by the workers, for the workers," and any "captain of industry" will tell you that the whole idea is preposterous. All Capitalist industry depends upon the existence of a class that sells its labour power in return for its keep, a class that by that sale signs away, theoretically—and despite Trade Unionism very often practically—any rights it may be held to possess outside the workshop. Once the factory buzzer has sounded all pretence of democracy goes.

What has really happened is that in response to the growing economic pressure of the working class, expressed through Trade Unionism in its various forms, the class that controls politics because of its control of property has in its own interests given to the workers the shadow of freedom without the substance. Political democracy is founded to-day not upon the fact of economic equality and industrial self-government, but upon the old principle that in a struggle the dominant party often finds it politic to surrender something of little value as a security for the retention of

something fundamental. In a sense it is true that any extension of the franchise represents an advance by the workers in their struggle for freedom; for such an extension does mark the fact that the owners of property have been compelled to meet their enemy in the gate. The fly in the ointment, however, is that they hold the gate. Outside are the workers, possessed of sufficient economic power to win a formal recognition of equality on the political plane; holding the gate are the few who, through their possession of a dominating economic power, dictate how far that formal political equality shall have play. It is the gate that matters, and the struggle for its possession must be waged on the economic field.

Arguments against direct action drawn from the "fact" of political democracy are no arguments at all, for they obscure the point that there can be no real "government of the people, by the people, for the people," in what is called politics unless that government finds full expression in the economic life of a community. The road to freedom lies not through the polling-booth, but through the workshop gates. Until this

simple fact is appreciated by the workers Labour will be forced to fight on a terrain that is favourable to its opponents; an appreciation of it will at once lead to an alteration both of the issues and of the methods employed. To gain economic freedom involves the workers in the task of securing economic power, and, having once secured it, of employing it on the economic field. Just in so far as the workers rely on the vote as the primary weapon, they will fail to win freedom; just in so far as they recognise that the value of the vote is in proportion to their industrial and economic strength, they will succeed.

The case of the constitutional elements in the Labour Movement against Direct Action has, then, no real substance against the fact that political democracy without industrial and economic freedom is a sham. But apart from that altogether, their case accepts the theory of the State enunciated by Capitalist philosophers. According to this theory the State is the expression of the desires and wishes of the people, and its main concern is the common good. This can only be true if the salient fact of modern civilisation is

Social Unity, if there is a common good for all the dwellers in a community, and if the whole idea of the Class Struggle is so much moonshine. In previous chapters I have argued that the salient fact of life to-day is Social Disunity, that there is, and can be, no good common alike to those who possess and those who have been dispossessed, and that the Class Struggle is the one dominant force. Holding this view, I regard the State as merely an instrument of the economically powerful class for the suppression of the non-dominant class. Historically, the State has always been a weapon of coercion, concerned both in its legislative and administrative side with the upholding of property-rights, and dependent not upon consent, but upon force. It is "the executive committee of the Capitalist class," and its overthrow is the mission of the workers.

To prove this in detail would take us beyond the scope of a book of this character, but one or two obvious examples will perhaps show what the general lines of such a proof would be. In 1914 the State was declared to be in danger, and those who used this form of words meant to convey that the freedom

and happiness of all the millions of workers of the United Kingdom were in jeopardy. The "State" was in danger because of the attack launched by the German Emperor upon the liberties and rights of small nationalities. Lurid pictures were drawn of the condition of helotry to which the British workers would be reduced were the German Eagle to fly over Buckingham Palace, and the workers were persuaded to take part in the crusade for "freedom and democracy." How many people after a study of the Peace Treaty of Versailles would still maintain that in 1914 millions of workers were faced with the loss of inestimable privileges because of German aggression? Does not practically every clause of that Treaty prove that what was in danger were the claims of rival groups of Capitalists to iron and steel and to concessions in various parts of the world? Does not practically every clause prove that the war was the result of the scramble for markets and a direct effect of Capitalism? The "Big Four" were concerned, when drafting the Treaty, not with the happiness and freedom of the workers; but with the securing to the owners of wealth of this free

and unfettered right to exploit not only their own "hands," but "hands" wherever they could be found. The war that began in August 1914 resulted not from a threat to freedom and democracy, but from a threat to the interests of the Allied Capitalists from the Capitalists of Central Europe. The "State" that was in danger was "the Executive Committee of the Capitalist class." Fortunately, five years of war has resulted in bringing that State into even more imminent jeopardy.

Another example on a smaller scale may be found in the action taken by the State whenever the "rights of property" are assailed. The war produced a situation under which the operation of the laws of supply and demand ceased to affect the price of commodities. One commodity, labour power, became particularly scarce, and the opportunity arose for its price to be driven up beyond the level of subsistence. The situation that faced employers after the Black Death was repeated after the great recruiting campaign. At once the economically dominant class which controlled the State—which was, in fact, the State—

grew alarmed. The result was the Munitions Act—a measure designed, in the words of one of the permanent officials of the Government, “to prevent wages from rising.” The State was seen in its true colours as the instrument of the holders of economic power. Had the workers not possessed economic power also, the only commodity whose price would have been controlled would have been labour power—actually, of course, the history of the country during the war was the history of a struggle of economic forces over the price of commodities of all kinds. Strikes and rumours of strikes were the weapons of the workers, silent economic pressure was the weapon of the ship-owners and the great armament firms. In the end the workers came off worst, but the experience proved to them that the “State” will give to them just what they can wring from it—and no more.

No doubt idealists who see life through rose-coloured glasses will regard this analysis as too brutal to be true. To them there is only one answer. “If the facts are not as stated, what are the facts?” The only alternative explanations offered rest on the

so-called fact of "social unity," and against this every fact of experience tells. The more the idealists continue to live in an atmosphere of their own creation, the worse for them in the end. The struggle exists, and its implications may as well be faced.

One implication in particular calls for notice here. Great play is made by critics of the Russian Revolution with "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat." Here, if anywhere, is a confutation of all the much-advertised belief of Communists in the principles of "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality"; here is the horror that good people always believed Communism to be, wicked and foul in its awfulness. No self-respecting person could have dealings with such a monster, and many of those in the Labour Movement, who resent intervention in Russia, carefully explain that they do not agree with Lenin and Trotsky. They regard the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as the negation of democracy and the denial of freedom.

What, in fact, is this dictatorship? It is the application of the principle upon which modern Capitalism rests for the definite purpose of ending modern Capitalism. It

is the use of coercive state to coerce the "coercers." It is the proletariat—the people who breed—using the machinery of Capitalism to destroy the remnants of the class that has hitherto been able to impose wage-slavery upon them. No one believes that this use of force by the workers is a "nice" thing; what matters is whether or not it is inevitable. That it is inevitable on the theory of the class struggle can instantly be seen. With the consummation of the change from private to communal ownership, with the change from ownership by the few as the normal mode of life to the application of the principle of communal service from all to all, there arises within the society affected by this change a struggle which still is a struggle of classes—but this time the suppressed class is the former class of oppressors. Not all at once do they see the light, and the dictatorship of the proletariat is the instrument born of Capitalism to make them see. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the counterpart in the transition period from individualism to Communism of the dictatorship of the few which is the normal and necessary condition under modern Capitalism. It differs

from this latter dictatorship in that it is transitory, and not permanent and normal. Below the workers there is no class to oppress. Once they have freed themselves the *raison d'être* of the coercive state disappears, and the way is free for the establishment of a new order of society. But just as to Capitalism organised Labour is a constant menace, so to the new society which is being born through revolution the existence of counter-revolutionary elements within it is a menace. When those elements are supported by the counter-revolutionaries outside, the menace becomes greater, and the measures taken to suppress it assume a sterner form. The dictatorship of the proletariat finds expression, for instance, in the "Red Terror" not by choice, but because against the new order all the forces of Capitalism the world over are aroused—and the only thing that Capitalism understands is force. The State which they have wielded for so long is turned against them, and its name is the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

To libertarians like Mr. Bertrand Russell, and to emotionalists like Mrs. Philip Snowden the contemplation of the possibility of this

dictatorship brings not an understanding of its necessity, but disgust at its existence. They are so terrified at the idea of what the dictatorship of the proletariat may produce, so horrified at the possible suppression of "formal" liberties, that they fail entirely to see the actual suppression of real freedom which accompanies the existence of the dictatorship of Capitalism. Observing the hard and rigid discipline imposed upon the workers in Russia by the dominant Communist party, observing that there the right to work carries with it the responsibility to share in the common toil, they cling to the "freedom" that Capitalism allows to people like themselves, and ignore the slavery that Capitalism necessitates for the many. Afraid of losing their own privileges, they pretend to be concerned about safeguarding these same privileges for the workers. They talk and write as though leisure and culture were the lot of all, instead of being the possession of a few—and talking and writing like this they become, despite themselves, the defenders of the present system. Behind their horror and disgust lies an unwillingness to face the harsh fact of life that in a society

where the great mass of people sell their labour power to private individuals there can be no release save through the forcible wrenching of this power to exploit other human beings from the hands that now possess it. They are afraid of the consequences of the Class War, and they hope, by denying this war's existence, to avoid the consequences. I am afraid that their lives will be one long disillusionment.

Lenin and Trotsky are not dictators because they like it—a more uncomfortable job it is hard to imagine—but because the facts of the transition from Capitalism to Communism demand that upon some one shall fall this responsibility. A revolution cannot be run without iron discipline among the revolutionaries, nor without a total disregard for the ordinary canons of bourgeois morality. People who call themselves Socialists and hope to destroy the wage-system without hurting somebody, and without shedding any of their traditional beliefs, live in a fool's paradise—and the end of such a paradise is distressing mainly to those who live there.

Bertrand Russell and Mrs. Philip Snowden are types—able and sincere types—of Socialists

who cannot, or will not, face facts. Quite honestly they desire a world free from economic servitude, quite earnestly they deplore the sorrows and sufferings of the poor, but they are not prepared to take the necessary steps to end the servitude and abolish the suffering. They are afraid of force. But how else do they propose to achieve their ends? By weeping? That hurts nobody. By preaching? That cuts no ice. By appeals to the rich to get off the backs of the poor? That only fixes the rich firmer in the saddle. Against the power of threatened interests weeping, preaching and appealing can accomplish nothing—history proves it, ordinary horse-sense shows it—for when interests are threatened they fight—and to meet them those who are attacking these interests must needs fight too.

The methods employed in that fight will vary from country to country and from time to time—but in every country and at all times they will involve the assumption of power by the class that is now bereft of everything but the power to rebel. And the form of that assumption is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The fundamental reason for the dictatorship is that in no other way can the present system be ended. It is for those who imagine that there is another way to declare their plans—for those of us who see no other way the duty is to prepare our forces so that the period of the dictatorship shall be as short as possible. It is not for us to defend our belief and our methods—it is for the others to show that our methods and beliefs are inadequate and wrong. That, I believe, is a task beyond their power, for always they come face to face with this clear issue and this straight question: "In the event of the organised workers in any country achieving an economic revolution do you propose that the fruits of that revolution shall be made secure? If you reply, 'Certainly we wish the fruits to be secured,' then we ask 'How?' If those who have been dispossessed struggle, as they will, to regain possession, are they to be suppressed? If they seek to produce a counter-revolutionary movement, are they to be fought? If they seek to enlist the help of outside Capitalist governments, are they to be opposed? Or must those who have secured victory in the

first round fail to press home their advantage because to press that advantage will outrage your traditional beliefs? ”

If the prize is worth securing it is worth the price demanded. And that the prize—a society free from economic subjection, a society based upon the principle of common service, a society based upon the idea of social equality—is worth securing not even Bertrand Russell or Mrs. Philip Snowden will deny. But they fear the instrument that must be used, and that fear will involve them in tacit support of the present system. They, and all like them, have to face the dilemma, either they are prepared “to go all out” for their ideal or they are not. If they are prepared, then they must accept the need for the dictatorship, if they are not prepared, then they must give up the attempt to achieve their ideal.

Let them, instead of shuddering at the prospect of the present minority being “coerced by the representatives of the present majority, try to understand the reasons for that coercion. To do that they will have to re-examine their whole philosophy—and if that re-examination still leaves them where

they are, then they must be content to be regarded as defenders of the present system, for only upon the assumption that the moral values of the present system are true for all time can their attitude be maintained.

They profess to desire a fundamental economic revolution. Are they prepared to secure that revolution whatever the cost? If they are, well and good; if not, then "those who are not with us are against us"—and despite their good intentions they stand as defenders of the values and shibboleths of Capitalism.

IV

" THE COMMUNITY "

ONE of the commonest of the shibboleths employed by Capitalists and their defenders in their joint endeavour to destroy the arguments of those who support direct action, and to weaken the workers when engaged in a conflict, is that a strike threatens the life of "the community." At the moment this method of attack is reserved for use in strikes that occur in great basic industries. Nobody yet, except perhaps the particular employers involved, has been found to maintain that a strike of women workers in the chain-making trade for a slightly larger starvation wage should be opposed because the success of the workers would imperil the stability of society—but let the miners or the railwaymen or the engineering workers put forward a demand, whether it be a demand for higher wages or for a fundamental reorganisation of the industry, and imme-

diately the chorus is raised, "The community is in danger."

What is the community, to which such touching reference is made in times of industrial crisis? Presumably those who use the words mean to imply that it is all the people living within a defined geographical area exclusive of those who are engaged in the struggle with their employers. When the miners are striking, the community consists of dockers, railwaymen, engineers, navvies, bootmakers, clerks, lawyers, etc., financiers and capitalists; when the railwaymen are on strike, the miners mysteriously take their place in the ranks of the community. You pays your money and you takes your choice! Actually, "the community" in any Capitalist country is, in the main, composed of men and women who are compelled to sell their labour power to the owners of property. It is composed, in other words, of workers. In a sense it is true that under Capitalism each section of workers necessarily fights for its own hand, but with the development of Capitalism these separate struggles tend to become unified; machinery is created which gives to them coherence and

meaning, and makes them all part of the struggle of the exploited class to get on even terms with their exploiters. Every big strike in a basic industry, every little strike in a small trade, properly regarded, is not an isolated and spasmodic outbreak, but a skirmish, an affair of outposts, between the workers and the employers. Inevitably, whilst these skirmishes are in progress, and so long as they are not properly organised and controlled, other members of the working class suffer from the effects of the stoppage. When a basic industry is held up the essential supplies are curtailed, but the object of the strike is not to produce suffering among the rest of the workers, but to force the employing class, for the moment, represented by the mine-owners, the State or the railway company, to acknowledge Labour's right to a fairer life. "The community" is compelled, so long as the strikes are fought out separately, by sections of the workers, to stand by and wait for the outcome of the struggle. They are in the position, not of being attacked, but of being non-combatants in the Class War. Their time for taking the offensive will come, and then those who were

combatants become, in their turn, non-combatants. In the final struggle there will be no non-combatants, for all the members of "the community" will be lined up on one side or the other.

The employment of "the community" weapon by the workers' opponents is, in fact, a dodge. It is successful only in so far as there is no clear understanding amongst those sections of the working class not engaged in the dispute of the actual situation in industry. It is particularly successful amongst the lower middle class, the *petit bourgeoisie*, and small shop-keepers, because here that understanding is lacking. These unfortunates find themselves being ground, as it were, between the upper millstone, Big Business, and the lower millstone, Organised Labour; they have little or no organisation of their own in the economic field; they live on small salaries or on the doubtful returns, that come from speculative business. They are indeed in a sorry plight. Clerks find that the cost of living runs far ahead of their yearly earnings; small shop-keepers find themselves unable to compete with the great multiple shops in the open market. They

are aware of only one thing, that the amount of money they handle seems ever to decrease in real value. They read papers, subsidised and backed by big business' interests, and they are told that the reason for every rise in the cost of living is the rapacious demands of the working class. Reading this they find a false comfort, and become the stalwart supporters of things as they are and the bitterest opponents of the other workers who are attempting to alter the world. They fail to see that their position as members of the *petit bourgeoisie* is, in all essentials, that of members of the class which they love to call "the working class." If they are clerks or commercial travellers, or if they follow any of the "respectable" callings, they are exploited by the firms for whom they work; if they are shop-keepers, they are crushed out by the Selfridges of the world. Their fight and their quarrel is not with the workers who are attempting to raise their own status, but with those who, taking advantage of their weakness, of their lack of organisation, reduce their standard of living or buy up their means of livelihood. Their enemy is the Capitalist and their ally the workers.

In short, the real “community” that is attacked when the workers in a great basic industry take action is not the “community” of the lower middle class but the “community” of Capitalists.

It is none the less true that this constant use by the Press of the phrase “the community in danger” has a tremendous influence on the amorphous, unorganised mass of workers who stand between the Organised Labour movement on the one hand and the Organised Capitalists on the other. It is, indeed, one of the most powerful weapons at the disposal of Capitalism, and Capitalism’s control of the Press makes it possible for a hundred papers throughout the country to exert their influence on the minds of the *petit bourgeoisie*. Those who own do not desire the facts of the Class War to be talked about or written about. They seek always to conceal the real position, and by means of the Press, the pulpit, the novel and the school they make “the worse case appear the better.” That the lower middle classes are in danger, no one will deny, but they are in danger not because of the upward march of their “working-class comrades,”

but because of the ever-increasing grip of capitalist trusts and combines on the business life of the world; most of all they are in danger because of their own stupidity in not recognising that until they become possessed of economic power they will be helpless in the battle of life. They have the remedy in their own hands. Let them link up their destinies with the destinies of the manual workers, let them join the organisations of the manual workers, let them recognise that they are members of the exploited class, and begin to wage the Class War.

There is something tragic in the way in which this phrase "the community in danger" hypnotises this great middle mass, but apart from the circumstances already mentioned, the hollowness of the cry is apparent when one begins to consider the actual position of the country in which we live. What constitutes the public or the "community," taking these words at the value given to them by the Capitalist Press? The National Union of Railwaymen, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the Transport Workers' Federation, which constitute the Triple Alliance, and are the organisations

against which most of the “community” stunts are directed, have an aggregate membership of about 1,750,000 men. They represent practically all the workers engaged in these three great basic industries. At the very least, close upon nine million people are dependent upon the work of the members of the Triple Alliance for their daily bread. The Alliance, in short, represents nearly a fifth of the entire population of the United Kingdom. To talk of this fifth of the population as “the unscrupulous minority determined to impose its will upon the community,” is, to use a phrase of a Scottish pastor whom I once met, “clotted nonsense.”

They form part of the great army of manual-working wage-slaves, who, together with their wives and families, number over thirty million of a population of forty-seven million. When the Press talks about the working class, or that section of the working class that is involved in a dispute, as being engaged in an attack upon the “community,” they are, in effect, saying that thirty million of the population through their advance guards are waging a war upon the sixteen million minority, and even that sixteen

million becomes appreciably smaller when one subtracts the organised civil servants, teachers, the lower branches of civil engineering, and so forth. The "community" that is being attacked is the remnant of Capitalists and parasites of Capitalists.

That there still exists a large mass unconscious of the real divisions in society is due to the astuteness and cleverness of the economically powerful owners of the world's wealth. For the moment the eyes of this mass are blind, but what argument cannot achieve the force of circumstances and the pressure of events will. The middle classes must make the choice—either voluntarily or under compulsion—between the workers and the owners. A failure to choose, a failure to realise the facts, can only end in their getting the worst of both worlds in their attempt to get the best. If they "come over and help us," well and good; if they remain where they are, or openly join the Capitalists, then they must face the consequences—and in the Class War the fate of those who waver is worse than that of those who fight. They perish without even the comfort of striking a blow.

V

SOME PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES .

THE need for direct action arises from the fact of Capitalism. Within the system of production for profit the existence of a monopoly that springs from the possession of property calls forth a counter-monopoly springing from the possible possession of the control of the commodity labour power. Very early in the history of the modern working-class movement it was realised that, however beneficial competition among employers might be, competition, unchecked and unregulated, among the workers produced nothing but low wages and evil conditions. Every employer from the point of view of his workers was not an isolated individual bargaining with isolated individuals, but a combination from whom concessions could only be won by combination. The fact that an employer possessed the instruments that the workers must needs use if they were to live, gave to him an economic grip against

which individual bargaining was helpless. And so the first organisations of workers arose. Their business was to prevent employers from buying the skill of craftsmen at cut rates, and their outlook was definitely reformist. "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work" was their motto. The need for organisation had been made apparent because of Capitalism, and the weapons the workers used—the strikes and bargaining backed by the power to strike—were conditioned by the very people against whom they were to be employed. The father of direct action is the Capitalist system.

Trade Unionism arose because the system of production necessitated the protection of individual workers from the attacks of individual Capitalists who are in reality combinations. There was nothing aggressive about Trade Unionism; it was purely defensive in its purposes, and it merely applied to labour power the lesson that factory production and large-scale production had taught the employer. Its weapon was the strike, as the weapon of the employer was the lock-out; its object was to sell a commodity in the highest market, as the object of the

employer was to buy that commodity in the cheapest. Both sides employed essentially the same methods.

It is not without point to recall that the arguments brought against the efforts of the workers to combine, and against the use to which they put their combinations, were just the arguments that are employed to-day against those who would use industrial pressure to attain ends that are other than reformist. Terms of abuse that to-day are hurled about in the columns of *The Morning Post* found their counterpart in the speeches and articles of the defenders of property during the last century. Then a strike for higher wages was "Anarchy," now a strike for the national ownership of the mines is "the end of all things"; then the existence of a Craft Union, claiming better conditions for its members within the Capitalist system was regarded as the forerunner of revolution, now the existence of a great industrial federation demanding freedom for its members is regarded as the revolution itself.

Nothing that is said by opponents of direct action to-day has not been said by the opponents of reformist Trade Unionism

in the past. It may well be that just as now the existence of Trade Unions is accepted as essentially right, and the use of the strike for better wages and conditions is safeguarded by law, so within the next fifty years people will regard with amazement those who oppose the use of Labour's organisations for revolutionary ends. Whether that be so or not matters little, for Labour must employ its power in this way or cease the attempt to raise its status. Capitalist methods of industry have developed in such a way as to render ineffective the old form of unionism, with its reliance on craft and its acceptance of Capitalist morality. Within the system there is no chance for Labour, and the organisations, that have hitherto worked within, are now being forced to work directly against the forms created by Capitalism. Direct action is not a theory built out of airy nothing, but a form of action necessitated by the facts of life.

What those facts are, I have already shown, and in this chapter I propose to deal with certain changes, necessitated by those facts. The first essential of an organisation that proposes to supplant Capitalism is that it

shall be fit for the work. You cannot employ an instrument capable only of raising the wages of a section of workers within an industry for the purpose of taking the industry over, and of running it once the employers have been removed. A degree of organisation is demanded that the old Trade Unionism never conceived, for a revolutionary purpose calls for a revolutionary instrument. The struggle, then, between the owners and the owned demands the complete organisation of the workers in each industry, and the linking-up of the industries into a close organisation, with a central co-ordinating body possessed of a co-ordinated policy and the power to make that policy effective. The owners have learnt this lesson, and they have their Federation of British Industries, their Combines and Trusts, their working agreements—in short, they have their machine. Equally definitely Labour has not.

There are in existence in the United Kingdom close upon 1200 Trade Unions. Formed on every conceivable theory of organisation, they attempt the task of securing the workers against oppression. How

far they are successful even in this limited task may be judged from their failure to see to it that the wages of their members increase as the cost of living rises; how far they are successful may be judged from the existence within the movement of bitter inter-union quarrels upon which the energy of organisers and members is fruitlessly wasted; how far they are successful may be judged from the unwillingness of all the organisations to sink their differences for the sake of the common good. Despite the fact of the concentration of capital, despite the growth of class consciousness among the employers, the Trade Union Movement still lacks real concentration, and still clings to an outworn craft or sectional consciousness. The Army of Labour is a figure of speech representing an aspiration, but not a reality. To the task of reorganising the Trade Union Movement all the best energies of the workers should be bent, for upon that reorganisation depends their future status in society. And in essaying that task they will not be without any guidance as to the forms that should be sought—the guidance is to be found within the system of production against which their

efforts are directed. In broad outline the ends to be aimed at are: (1) Real Industrial Unionism; (2) Central Control; and (3) the Creation of a Commissariat for the future Army of Labour.

Industrial Unionism means the grouping together of the workers within an industry, not on the basis of craft or grade or sex, but upon the basis of workers. It is a form of organisation that follows not the process or the employer, but the product, and its aim is to secure an absolute monopoly of labour power among those engaged in turning out a particular commodity or in rendering a particular service. Nor does it stop at an industry. Each industry has connections with, and to a varying extent is dependent upon, practically every other industry, and Industrial Unionists seek to express that interdependence in the form of the organisation. To attain their ends they put forward different and often conflicting proposals, and from amongst these proposals the choice has to be made—or rather from amongst these proposals one will be found that most nearly fits the situation. Personally I hold that, in this country, the change will come

not through the creation of new organisations, but by the pressure of events and ideas upon the existing forms. The way to the Industrial Unionism of the future lies through a development of the Trade Unionism of to-day. Slow the process of amalgamation may be, but it is inevitable, and however impatient one gets at the delay, he must recognise that attempts to start new forms mean still further delay and still more confusion. There is no royal road either to freedom or to proper organisation, for the path is marked out by the system that some day is to be destroyed.

There are, however, certain outstanding movements within Trade Unionism that have special significance in this connection. The first is the Shop Stewards' Movement. How far anything exists that merits the name of a movement is an open question, but of the existence of a strong body of opinion within the ranks of organised labour that sees in the shop steward the hope of the future, there can be no doubt. And for our purposes the idea behind the "movement" is of more importance than the movement itself. Hitherto it has been the general

practice of Trade Unions—a practice directly due to their craft basis—to regard the local branches as the units of administration and the units of action. Organisation has not been industrial in character, but territorial, and the disputes in any particular shop or works have had to be submitted to meetings of members of the organisation, selected drawn from the locality in which the works is situated, and often, as a result, including men not connected with the industry concerned. Again, the members of each organisation in the shop or works in question have had to wait for the sanction of their various executives before they could move. The result of this waiting is that the favourable moment passes and the workers remain unsatisfied. To remedy this the Shop Stewards' Movement declares that the unit of production must be the unit of administration. The place where the struggle occurs is the works or pit or other unit of production; the bond that unites the workers is the fact that they are all engaged upon the making, or getting, of a particular commodity. The object of all organisation among the workers is to be able to stop production—and they

argue that these facts lead not only to Industrial Unionism, but to a form of organisation based upon the shop. Practical experience has, in short, taught them that Capitalist methods of production have left Trade Union organisation behind, and they seek to bring it into line. No one, I think, will question the justice of the case, nor will any one be found seriously to argue against it. Consider any successful strike, and at once it will be seen that its success has depended upon the putting into practice of this theory; consider an unsuccessful strike, such as the Moulders' sixteen weeks' struggle, and it will be seen that the failure is due solely to a disregard of this theory. From this it follows that the unit of administration in the Industrial Unions of the future must be the unit of production. Organisation must begin with this unit, and always the bond must be the bond of the product and not the bond of habitation. That is the fundamental lesson of the Shop Stewards' Movement regarded purely from the point of view of organisation. Other lessons for the workers this movement has, but, as the shop stewards will recognise, those lessons are

conveyed in the general purpose of this book.

The second movement is the Triple Alliance. I am not concerned with the achievement or lack of achievement of that Alliance, but solely with certain fundamental theories that lie behind it. The Triple Alliance is an expression in concrete form of the doctrine of sympathetic action; it is an expression of the fact that the sympathy of one section of the workers with another section cannot stop short of rendering definite help by means of concerted action; it is the beginning of the machine for making effective the sympathetic strike. Instinctively the workers have felt that, in so far as they handled the products of any employer or section of employers with whom a Union or a number of Unions was in dispute, they were blacklegging. No single strike takes place without a discussion arising on the question of "tainted goods," and no big strike occurs without an attempt being made unofficially to put into operation the boycott of those goods. The instinctive resort to this form of direct action has its roots in the real necessities of the situation. It is

a necessary outcome of the belief that the interests of all workers are one, and the perfect machine of Labour must make provision for its extended use. The Triple Alliance is a temporary machine created because the interdependence of mines, railways and transport was so close that a dispute in one section automatically involved the others—a strike at a pit immediately involved the railwaymen, for they had to decide whether by shifting coal from other pits they were not in effect engaged in blacklegging; a strike on the railways at once involved workers engaged in other forms of transit. The creation of an organisation capable of meeting this situation was essential, and in 1914 the Triple Alliance was launched. The idea of sympathetic action became by that step a recognised weapon of the working-class. Since 1914 the development of Capitalism has gone on apace, the interdependence of industries has grown greater, and as a result the need for a wider organisation than the Triple Alliance has become apparent. That wider organisation must include all sections, and must be able to apply the weapon of the

sympathy strike whenever and wherever it is needed.

I have used the word "must," in this connection because there seems to be no halting-place between the old method of detail lighting and the new one of unity of command. The Labour Movement is faced with an organised Capitalism that always uses the weapon of sympathetic action; it is faced with an organised Capitalism that recognises an injury to one member as an injury to all. There is no other course open to the workers if they desire to advance—or even if they desire merely to keep what they have got—than to expand the application of the principle already accepted by the Triple Alliance. The once-dreaded doctrine of the sympathetic strike has become a matter of urgent practical necessity.

Once that is recognised, the way to the creation of a General Staff becomes comparatively simple. The position at the moment is that there exists no central body capable of controlling Labour or capable of acting in the name of Trade Unionism. Every year a Congress assembles, and talks, often with eloquence and power, on the

various subjects that are urgent. Its talk eventuates in resolutions, the resolutions are duly considered by the Parliamentary Committee; the Congress reassembles and the cycle begins anew. The reason is not far to seek. Just as the craft basis of organisation is a relic of the simpler modes of Capitalism, so the T.U.C., with its Parliamentary Committee, is a relic of the days when Labour served its ends by "lobbying" and deputations, of the days when the movement had found no political expression. The function of the Parliamentary Committee was to convey to the King's Ministers the wishes of organised Labour—that function it fulfilled admirably, the only drawback being that the function has for years been out of date. What is needed now is a central co-ordinating body, representative of the various industries into which the workers are grouped, endowed with powers of control, concerned with preventing overlapping of organisation and waste of energy, and able to move the whole force of Labour in the industrial field. It is a far cry from the present Trades Union Congress to the kind of organisation just sketched, but there are signs that a body with powers

similar to these will arise. Within the movement the forces that are compelling a reorganisation on the basis of industrial unionism are also compelling a reorganisation of the old central machinery. And as with the creation of Industrial Unions, so with the building up of a General Staff, the process will be gradual and will work within the existing forms. I admit that it is hard to believe that any good thing can come out of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress—but it is at least as hopeful as anything else within official Trade Unionism. .

More important for our immediate purposes than the question of how this new organisation will come, is a realisation of the need for it. It if be true, as I have argued, that the power of the workers depends upon their power to stop production, and if the hampering of production depends upon the creation of a monopoly of labour, not only in one industry, but in all industries, the need for a supervising and controlling force is apparent. It is not a question of gaining advantages for this or that section of Labour, nor of winning temporary increases

of wages for a few, but a question of building up a machine that shall take the place of the present system, and that shall be able to control production in the interests of all. For that purpose a central co-ordinating body is required. Without it the old story of divided effort will be repeated, and energy that should be expended in the struggle against exploitation, will be wasted in internal disputes and internal quarrels. The final goal that Labour seeks makes this central body a necessity. Equally the immediate situation calls for it. Capital is centrally organised and increasingly centrally controlled, and that fact alone is sufficient justification for the demand that Labour shall be likewise equipped.

Elsewhere I deal with the historical working-out of this idea of a General Staff. That history is not yet completed, for the Army of Labour will not be properly equipped until its staff is endowed with power to act—until the idea behind the Council of Action of August 1920 becomes the idea behind the whole movement. Nor will it be properly equipped until the objective of the army is frankly revolutionary and the staff functions to that

end. Gradually the actual form of the machinery is being created, but the spirit is far to seek. Nor do I think that that spirit will arise in the offices, either of the General Staff or of the great Unions; it will grow in the workshop and mine, and the speed of its growth will depend upon the extent to which power and ~~authority~~ are delegated to the workers when actually engaged at their work. The General Staff without the spirit throughout the rank and file will, despite its form, be as useless and futile as the Parliamentary Committee.

It is here, and on the question of giving executive authority to the General Staff, that the struggle over the problem of the reorganisation of the British Trade Unions will come. There are vested interests inside the Army of Labour which will resent any proposal that they should surrender their independence of action; they will revolt against the idea of discipline. That revolt will be faced and defeated, but the struggle will be no light matter.

There is another essential part of the equipment of Labour that calls for attention. It is the building-up of a commissariat

Strikes are to-day productive of terrible suffering among the women and children, and the weakest link in the chain of Labour is found in the stomachs of the non-combatants. Patiently and silently they have to stand by, spectators of the struggle between their men and the employers; for them there is no joy of battle to lighten the terrors of an empty larder; for them the possibility of making conditions better in the future must seem small compared with the fact of their hungry children. It is the wives and mothers who shoulder the heaviest burdens when direct action is applied in its final forms. Between them and starvation stand the dwindling funds of the union and the unorganised help of the rest of the Labour Movement. It is here that the Co-operative Movement can help.

There are many who see in the Co-operative Movement the embryo of the future society. They visualise its development, both on the distributive and productive side, until the day comes when all the people are members of their "Store," and all the stores part of a productive and distributive agency owning and controlling all that the world

to develop the Co-operative Movement on its productive side, they should urge still further experiments in the control of transport and shipping, they should encourage the expenditure of capital on farms and dairies, tea and sugar plantations, clothing mills and boot factories—and all this should be done not primarily in order to fit the Co-operative Movement to take the place of Capitalism, but in order to secure the workers against defeat through the wasting bodies of their wives and children. The Co-operative Movement forms part of the economic power the workers wield, and its immediate function is to be used as a weapon in the class struggle.

All the suggestions that have been advanced in this chapter are practical consequences of a belief in the theory that the workers' ultimate struggle lies in the economic field. They have been urged not as a final panacea for the evils that exist as the result of class domination, but as protective measures demanded by the nature of the struggle and called for by the facts of the struggle. They are, in short, the "practical politics" of the war of the classes.

however small a scale, involves the disappearance for the time being of the workers' regular source of income; it involves an immediate "tightening of the belt" and a definite shortage of food and clothing. Direct action on a large scale necessarily accentuates this condition. The Co-operative Movement can be, and should be, used to protect the workers from the worst effects of an appeal to the use of force. All its members are workers, and upon them fall the ultimate effects of the success or failure of any strike; they have common interests with the section that is for the moment involved in the dispute; it is to their interest to aid them. Spasmodically this aid is given now. The C.W.S. Bank advances money to the Unions for strike pay, the Co-operative Wholesale Societies supply food at cost price, as in the case of Dublin. But there is as yet no combination. What is required—indeed what is actually being created—is an organisation representative of the Consumers' and Producers' sides of the movement, whose business it shall be to secure a supply of food during the periods of strikes. To this end they should help

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VI

SYMPATHETIC ACTION AND SABOTAGE

IN the previous chapter I have outlined roughly certain of the practical consequences that spring from the acceptance by the Trade Union Movement of the belief in the use of direct action for other than reformist ends. In the main these consequences, as will have been seen, involve radical reorganisation of the movement, with the consequent surrendering of the individual authority of Union Executives to a central co-ordinating body. What was accomplished in the realm of theory by the creation of the scratch Council of Action to deal with the Polish situation in 1920 needs to be translated into a permanent form for the governance of the organised working-class movement. But the direct consequences involve not only the re-creation of the machine, but the adoption, as a definite method, of certain forms of direct action that have hitherto been responsible for the greatest

amount of criticism and opposition, both within and without the ranks of Labour. I refer to the sympathetic strike and to the use of sabotage.

Any one who has seen a Trade Union demonstration must have been struck by the unanimity with which the banners of the demonstrators declare that "An injury to one is an injury to all," and he must have wondered how it was that this perfectly justifiable sentiment seems to be lost sight of in any crisis. If it were true that an injury to one is an injury to all, then the interests of a day labourer in the Hebrides should be of vital importance to the skilled engineer in London, but the fact remains that a dispute affecting a Hebridean passes, in the main, entirely unnoticed in the ranks of the skilled engineers. Strikes on questions affecting one grade of workers are regarded as having no bearing upon the status and position of other grades, and yet, at the same time, there is an instinctive feeling among men in the workshops that every dispute of which they learn, however small or wherever it occurs, has a bearing upon their own position. The sympathetic strike is the

organised translation of this instinctive feeling into action.

During the last twelve or fifteen years there have been spasmodic attempts to create the machinery necessary for the effective application of the economic power of the workers as a whole in support of any section whose ~~interests~~ were threatened or whose demands were refused. A strike, for instance, among shop assistants in London has been accompanied by the expressed intention of organisations representing transport workers to refuse to handle goods consigned to the employer whose attitude has caused the dispute. There have, too, been unauthorised and even authorised movements by railwaymen in support of other sections of Labour, and the doctrine of "tainted goods" has been applied spasmodically, but without any real national attempt at co-ordination, in practically every large dispute since the great Dublin lock-out.

None the less the official leaders of Labour regard with the greatest concern any theorist who argues that if a dispute is worth while embarking upon, it is worth while winning, and that if winning involves the use of other

sections than those directly concerned in the result of the dispute, those other sections should be moved in support. The reason for this hostility lies in the fact that practically every dispute, however small, brings into the arena all the transport workers, and in particular the railwaymen. These pivotal classes of Labour argue, and argue quite correctly, that, if they are to be expected to help every Tom, Dick, or Harry engaged in a dispute, they must be secured against financial loss, and must, through the Trade Union Movement, be given some say in deciding whether or not a dispute shall be fought out to the finish. It is, in fact, an easy thing to say that an injury to one is an injury to all, but, it is by no means an easy thing to put that sentiment into practice. The fear of the disintegrating effects of the application of the sympathetic strike upon well-organised bodies of Labour is, I believe, at the back of the failure of the Trade Union Movement to adopt this particular form of direct action as one of its weapons against Capitalism.

I cannot attempt to say more on this question here than dogmatically to state certain beliefs and put forward certain

practical suggestions arising out of those beliefs. Organised capital quite definitely and deliberately has recognised the truth of the interdependence of one set of employers on another, and to-day no decision is reached on the question of taking action in face of the workers' demands until the whole body of Capitalists has been consulted. For this purpose there has been created an organisation known as the Federation of British Industries. Representing the great mass of employers, it wields tremendous power both in the outside world of industry and in the inner world of government. One section of employers, say, for instance, the coal-owners, finds itself faced with a demand by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and immediately that section seeks and obtains the support of engineers, ship-builders, railway magnates, financiers. Support is given without any outward display, and, in nine cases out of ten, the "man in the street" is totally unaware that the support is being given. Quietly and effectively the Federation of British Industries can render assistance, because only in the extremest of cases is it necessary for the Federation to

take dramatic action, such as the declaration of a lock-out covering sections of industry unaffected by the particular dispute. Labour, however, if it is to act sympathetically, must almost always act in a dramatic way. Men must be called out here and called out there; this lot of goods must be declared tainted and orders given that they shall not be handled; this section of workers must be told not to do this class of work, and so on—every one of the moves involving an immediate and open dislocation of the industrial life of the community.

The very fact of Labour's action having to be of this dramatic character immediately involves the movement in a struggle with organised capital, and therefore with the State. The struggle is open, and all Labour's attacks and defeences have to be conducted in the full light of day. Of the effects every member of the community is at once conscious. This fact has got to be faced, and the only conceivable way in which it can effectively be met is by the deliberate organisation of Labour for the purpose of bringing to the support of any particular section the weight, either of the whole Labour Movement, or of

such parts of the Labour Movement as are deemed essential. Against the silent sympathetic action of massed capital Labour has got to use the more obvious method of the properly organised strike boycott. There is no question here of the general strike every time and all the time, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the general strike would not, and should not, be called. One does not use a sledge-hammer to crack a nut. The general strike is Labour's ultimate—or at least penultimate—weapon. It is held in reserve for the capture of control. What is demanded is the submission of all national disputes to a central executive authority empowered to move other sections of the workers in support and to take such steps as it deems advisable, once the dispute has been submitted, to bring that dispute to a successful termination. If Labour adopts the weapon of sympathetic action, there can be no question of giving to any section the right to contract out of the obligations that would follow such an adoption, and the experience of the Triple Alliance will show the necessity for rigid discipline.

The Triple Alliance, as I have pointed out,

is an attempt to give practical recognition to the interdependence of various grades of workers, but every time the Triple Alliance has been put to the test it has failed as a fighting machine, because its constitution does not make it obligatory on any section to carry out the decisions of the Alliance. The miners, for instance, even though the other sections of the Alliance regarded one of their movements as being ill-timed, are under no obligation to obey that expression of disapproval, and are free to "run their own show on their own." That means that the recognition of the interdependence of railwaymen, transport workers and miners is only half-hearted, and cannot be made effective until the power to contract out from the obligations of the Alliance is definitely refused. This weakness of the Triple Alliance would only be accentuated were the reorganisation of the movement as a whole through the creation of a General Staff to stop short of giving to that Staff complete executive authority. One cannot play at employing sympathetic action, nor can one allow the effective employment of that action to be jeopardised by the natural desire of any section of the movement to

retain full control over its own activities and full right to refuse to abide by the decisions of the others. The Labour Movement has need to learn the lesson of unity of command; it has to be prepared to sacrifice the autonomy that traditionally belongs to its various component parts in the interests of that victory which can only come when the forces of organised Labour are employed according to plan, either as a whole or in detail, as the forces at the disposal of a State are employed in war.

Spasmodic and ill-organised sympathetic action brings nothing but chaos. Organised and well-directed sympathetic action calls for a greater measure of discipline, of loyalty and of sacrifice than the British Labour Movement has hitherto displayed. Nobody when making a speech on Labour platforms denies the truth of the statement that "an injury to one is an injury to all," but very few are prepared to face the direct consequences involved in putting this admirable principle into practice. There is, in short, no quarrel on theory; there is a very real and serious unwillingness to face the consequences arising from that theory.

When one turns to the use of sabotage one

finds, not only a quarrel as to the practical effects of the use of sabotage, but a real difference of opinion on the theoretical question as to whether sabotage is ever justified.

Sabotage means the clogging of the machine of Capitalist industry by the use of certain forms of action, not necessarily violent and not necessarily destructive. It is commonly supposed to mean, purely and simply, the smashing of machinery, either by the direct breaking-up of the machines or by rendering them useless by methods involving a deterioration of their value and efficiency. This idea of sabotage is very partial and unfair. The machinery of Capitalism can be clogged quite effectively without the employment of that form of sabotage which expresses itself in destruction. There are, in fact, forms of sabotage the employment of which would be, directly and permanently, to the benefit of the community, quite apart from those forms of sabotage which are directly and momentarily of benefit to the workers engaged in a struggle.

One of the most appalling signs of modern civilisation is the constant foisting upon the public of adulterated foodstuffs and

shoddy articles! It would be sabotage if the workers engaged, for instance, in the grocery trades were to refuse to sell any commodity without describing to the purchaser exactly what that commodity contained. They would, to take a simple example, be sabotaging their employer if they informed the working-class housewife that the margarine they were selling contained hardly any nutritive qualities and had been produced under conditions of labour not calculated to secure cleanliness. They would be sabotaging if they also added the further information that their own wages as shop assistants, engaged in selling the margarine, were of such a character as to compel them to resort to other ways of ensuring a reasonable livelihood. That is a form of sabotage which, if organised throughout the country as part of the fight against Capitalism, would immediately reduce the grocery and provision trades to chaos.

The same effects would be produced in the woollen industry were the workers to refuse to produce shoddy cloth, or were the assistants in tailoring or drapery establishments to inform intending customers exactly what had been used to produce the goods

exposed for sale. In both these instances no violence is used, but a properly organised employment of the device of telling the truth quite effectively clogs the Capitalist machine.

A still more striking example of this form of sabotage can be found in the refusal of builders to erect houses that are not exactly substantial or lasting. The housing problem could be made infinitely more complicated, without in the least hurting the interests of those who have to live in the houses, by a refusal of the organised workers in the building industry to assist in the erection of jerry-built dwellings. Such a movement would go far to destroy the power of the contractor; it would compel public authorities to resort to direct labour or to the Guild System for the completion of their housing plans, and, above all, it would secure for the workers in other industries houses that, so far as the shell was concerned, could be made into homes. Nor need this form of sabotage stop at building, for in all the trades that cater directly to the consuming public the power of the Capitalist combine can most effectively be broken, not by smashing the tools of production,

but by telling the truth about the methods employed.

It is extraordinary that the Labour Movement should not have explored the possibilities latent in its possession of these perfectly peaceful forms of sabotage. The reason for this remissness lies in the fact that the great mass of the workers still think of sabotage as of necessity involving destruction. But even were it true that sabotage and destruction were synonymous terms, it does not necessarily follow that the workers would be unjustified in employing sabotage as a weapon in the Class War. Whether or not it pays the workers engaged in a dispute to destroy machines which, when the dispute is over, they will have themselves to put right, is a question not of morality, but of expediency. On the moral side, any one who accepts the theory of the Class War can have nothing to say in reproof of any section of workers if it chooses to put sand into railway-engine boilers, or to destroy the vital parts of machines, or to break looms. The workers have the right to use every method likely to weaken the power of their employers;—they are concerned not with conventional morality,

but with the problem of whether the use of the weapon will "pay," and on this question of expediency there is plenty of room for discussion. Personally, though I realise that every case must be judged on its merits, I am inclined to think that, when all the advantages and disadvantages to the workers of this particular form of sabotage are weighed in the balance, the debit side will be much heavier than the credit. There is no need to smash machinery if one's ends can be served by less destructive methods, and there are forms of sabotage, as I have suggested, much more capable of clogging the wheels of Capitalism than the outright smashing of the machine itself.

Sabotage and the sympathetic strike are modes of working-class activity that have not been sufficiently exploited in Great Britain. They are modes that call for a high degree of organisation, a high degree of discipline and a tremendous power of self-control. The spasmodic use either of the sympathetic strike or of any form of sabotage produces nothing but disappointment for the users. Their careful and ordered use could be employed as a potent and effective weapon in

the struggle of the classes. But that ordered use depends upon the reorganisation of the Trade Union Movement and the creation of a central, co-ordinating body with full executive powers.

VII

TOWARDS A GENERAL STAFF

WITHIN the last few years there has been a growing appreciation among the workers of the need for a drastic reorganisation of the Trade Union Movement. More and more it has been felt that the old Trade Union Congress, with its obsolete Parliamentary Committee and its total lack of real authority and power, was unfitted to deal with the tremendously urgent problems that continue to face the workers. Equally there has grown up a belief that a sectional organisation such as the Triple Alliance, even if it be eminently fitted to deal with its own domestic crises, could not, and should not, be expected to take the place of, or to act for, the movement as a whole. The need was for some authoritative body really representative of all organised workers, closely in touch with the political expressions of organised labour—the National Labour Party and other bodies—and working

in harmony with the Co-operative Movement. To give practical expression to these feelings and desires certain definitely constructive steps have been taken, and there can be little doubt that, as a result of these changes, something will emerge more akin to a General Staff than the old Parliamentary Committee.

What will happen is for the future to reveal. Meanwhile there is some help and guidance to be obtained from a brief chronicle of what has been done since the Armistice of the European War was declared. Haphazard and experimental as the moves have been, they are none the less moves—and moves in the right direction.

The nine days' Railway Strike of September-October 1919 brought the Labour Movement right up against the fact that it possessed no body capable of taking hold and using that strike for really big ends. Not only had it no body of this kind, but it did not possess any organisation capable either of assisting the railwaymen to get what they demanded or of procuring any satisfaction from the State. Faced with this emergency a scratch committee—calling itself significantly enough the Negotiating Committee—was

formed, largely at the instance of Robert Williams of the Transport Workers' Federation. This Committee represented nothing but a feeling that something had got to be done, and in its endeavour to do something it had to usurp the functions of the Parliamentary Committee, which, as usual in a crisis, neither wanted to do anything nor was capable of doing anything had it wanted. The Committee co-opted members from various organisations, including the Parliamentary Committee itself, called a conference of permanent officials of Trade Unions, and did its best to end the dispute. Its members and the railwaymen's officials were alike afraid of the possibilities created by the strike, and used every endeavour to close the strike down. Mixing threats of a general strike with appeals to the sympathetic feelings of Lloyd George, they at last succeeded. The railway strike ended, the men got some of the things they wanted, the Government won. But the lesson of the dispute was not lost. The need for a permanent central organisation was realised, and the members of the mediating committee set to work to force a reorganisation of the movement.

Articles in the Labour Press urged the necessity for forming a General Staff, which should be prepared for rapid action in future struggles. Statements were made by Trade Union officials, among them Harry Gosling, John Turner, C. T. Cramp, William Adamson, Arthur Henderson, Robert Williams, Ernest Bevin, and Fred Bramley, supporting the proposal. There was general agreement that the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress was not endowed with sufficient power to act with speed and decision, and Robert Williams said he was "beginning to lose faith in the willingness of the Parliamentary Committee to grapple with the matter."

Early in October 1919 the members of the mediating committee, which had acted during the railway strike, met the Parliamentary Committee to discuss the problem, and it was decided that a joint sub-committee should be set up to report on possible schemes. This committee consisted of representatives of the Parliamentary Committee, the mediating committee, and of the Trade Union side of the Provisional Joint Committee of the Industrial Conference.

At the end of November this joint sub-committee presented an interim report to a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee, which then adopted a resolution for submission to the special Trades Union Congress, which was to meet on December 9. This resolution instructed the Parliamentary Committee to revise the Standing Orders of Congress so as to secure the following changes in the functions and duties of the Executive—

1. "To substitute for the Parliamentary Committee a Trades Union Congress General Council, to be elected annually by Congress."
2. "To prepare a scheme determining the composition and methods of election of General Council."
3. "To make arrangements for the development of administrative departments in the offices of the General Council, in order to secure the necessary officials, staff, and equipment for an efficient Trade Union centre."

The Parliamentary Committee was also

instructed to consult with the Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement, for the purpose of devising means for carrying on joint campaigns with these bodies.

This resolution was carried at the Special Congress by 2,884,000 votes to 1,722,000, in spite of the fact that J. Bromley, of the Locomotive Engineers, who prophesied the failure of this new body, and Frank Hodges, of the Miners' Federation, spoke against the resolution.

The Co-ordination Sub-Committee continued its labours, and, after the Special Congress, met in consultation with representatives of the Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement. The terms of reference for its consultations with these bodies were, as follows—

“*Research* : To secure general and statistical information on all questions affecting the worker as producer and consumer by the co-ordination and development of existing agencies.

“*Legal advice*, on all questions affecting the collective welfare of the members of working-class organisations.

"*Publicity*, including the preparation of suitable literature dealing with questions affecting the economic, social, and political welfare of the people; with machinery for inaugurating special publicity campaigns to meet emergencies of an industrial or political character."

By the end of June 1920 the Co-ordination Committee had presented its report to the Parliamentary Committee. The report was adopted, and was submitted to the Trades Union Congress, which met at Portsmouth on September 6, in the form of a resolution amending the Standing Orders of the Trades Union Congress.

The General Council which was to take the place of the Parliamentary Committee was to be composed of thirty members representing seventeen trade groups, as follows—

| GROUP. | No. represented at 1919 Congress, in thousands. | Representation on Council of 30. |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Mining and Quarrying | 712 | 8 |
| Railways | 545 | 8 |
| Transport (other than Railways) | 360 | 2 |
| Shipbuilding | 154 | 2 |

| GROUP. | No. represented at 1919 Congress, in thousands. | Representation on Council of 30. |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Engineering, Founding, and Vehicle Building | 574 | 3 |
| Iron and Steel, Engine-men, and Minor Metal Trades | 218 | 2 |
| Building, Woodworking, and Furnishing | 352 | 2 |
| Printing and Paper | 438 | 1 |
| Cotton | 316 | 2 |
| Textiles (other than Cotton) | 161 | 1 |
| Clothing | 123 | 1 |
| Leather, Boot and Shoe and Hat-making | 111 | 1 |
| Glass, Pottery, Chemicals, Food, Drink, Tobacco, Brushmaking and Distribution | 141 | 1 |
| Agriculture | 103 | 1 |
| Public Employees | 186 | 1 |
| Non-manual Workers | 100 | 1 |
| General Workers | 1,013 | 4 |
| | <u>5,257</u> | <u>30</u> |

The Parliamentary Committee itself consisted of only sixteen members, but the Co-ordination Committee recommended the larger number because of the greatly increased number of workers represented at Congress.

The General Council was to be elected by Congress, each Union having the right to

nominate candidates to represent it in its group on the General Council. Having been elected, the Council was to sub-divide itself into five sub-committees, according to the following plan—

| | Members on Sub-Committee representing industry. | Total number of members in group. |
|---|--|--|
| GROUP A. | | |
| Mining | 3 | 8 |
| Railways | 3 | |
| Transport | 2 | |
| GROUP B. | | |
| Shipbuilding | 1 | 8 |
| Engineering | 3 | |
| Iron and Steel | 2 | |
| Building | 2 | |
| GROUP C. | | |
| Cotton | 2 | 5 |
| Other Textiles | 1 | |
| Clothing | 1 | |
| Leather | 1 | |
| GROUP D. | | |
| Glass, Pottery, Distribution, etc. | 1 | 6 |
| Agriculture | 1 | |
| General Workers | 4 | |
| GROUP E. | | |
| Printing | 1 | 8 |
| Public Employers | 1 | |
| Non-manual workers | 1 | |
| | 30 | 30 |

The duties of the General Council are stated as—

- (a) To keep watch over all industrial movements, and to co-ordinate action.
- (b) To promote common action by the Trade Union Movement, not only on wages and hours, but on any question which may arise between Trade Unions and employers, or between Trade Unions and the Government.

The General Council has power to assist any Union which is attacked on any question of vital principle.

Propaganda for the purpose of strengthening Trade Union organisation, and the promotion of solidarity with the Labour Movements of other countries are included in the General Council's duties.

Officials whose duty it is to specialise in the work of collecting information on all matters concerning the Trade Union Movement are to be appointed by the General Council.

These proposals were submitted to the Trades Union Congress held at Portsmouth in September, and, with certain modifica-

tions, were adopted by 4,858,000 to 1,767,000 on a "card" vote. The modifications took the form of adding an additional Group F representing those unions having women members. This new group is entitled to two women to voice its claims on the General Council. - The net result of the Congress's debates was, therefore, to approve the plan of the sub-committee, but to give special representation on the new General Council to women.

There the matter stands. A new central body has been formed endowed with wide functions, but still incapable of exerting executive authority. It is better than the old Parliamentary Committee, not only because it does represent clearly defined industrial groups, but because its instructions do recognise the need for a new viewpoint and a new type of activity.

Time alone can tell how far this new machinery will work. Much will depend upon the personnel of the Council, and of that the best one can say is that the old blood is at least slightly admixed with new. More will depend, however, on the length to which the Council is able to go in reorganising the

movement as a whole. And here the old traditional desire "to run their own shows" will undoubtedly operate. The Council will run the risk of being a General Staff without an effective army to carry out its wishes—and that danger is only too real. The "forms" of organisation will exist at the top, but below will still exist the same old chaos. To meet this contingency there seems only one expedient—the continued existence of all the unofficial shop stewards' committees, reform movements and the like. Their function will be to stir up the dry bones of the movement, to give it purpose and direction, and to help to force a re-shaping of the movement. They are the gadflies whose function it is to sting in the right place and at the right time. An Army of Labour can, and will, be created in Great Britain, but it will require infinite patience and courage in the creating. Maybe events will outstrip the slow progress towards this army, and we shall be faced with a revolutionary situation before we are ready. Should that occur, then of the machinery at hand the best use must be made.

VIII

EDUCATION AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

AGAINST the views to which expression has been given in previous chapters the whole educational practice of Capitalist countries takes its stand. According to the conventional theory education is something that cannot be confined within the four walls of a party or a sect; it is free and unbiassed, concerned only with the development of the human mind in the interests of truth; it is "above the battle." On this theory the Class Struggle can find no place in the class-rooms of our Elementary and Secondary Schools or in the lecture halls of our Universities and Colleges. There "Truth" is pursued, and, in the rarefied atmosphere that accompanies this pursuit, nothing so sordid as the Class Struggle can exist.

It is an exceedingly comforting theory for those to whom the continuance of the present system means so much. Sheltered behind it, they take the child at its most

impressionable period and instil into it—in the name of truth—views and attitudes of mind that are the direct product of the Class Struggle whose existence all “true educationalists” so vigorously deny. Who is there that does not recall how well the interests of the prevailing forms of society were served in his youth, and are served now, by the lessons on geography and history given by teachers who are themselves in the grip of those forms? A child leaves the Elementary Schools to-day completely ignorant of the facts of social life in the different periods of his country’s development, but possessed of an amazing collection of dates of battles and a wide knowledge of the names of kings and queens. To him Wat Tyler was a rebel who well deserved death; Henry VIII was a man of amorous inclinations and stout Protestant faith; Elizabeth was a queen of great personal beauty who by the grace of God defeated Philip of Spain; Charles the First was executed by Cromwell because he tried to extract ship-money from John Hampden—and so on from the days of King Alfred until the accession of George the Fifth. Any

serious attempt to teach history as the struggle of various classes to raise their status and to win economic freedom, would be frowned upon by school managers and educational authorities as a departure from the truth.

Nor does geography fare any better. Take a lad who has just left school and ask him what he conceives geography to be. Probably he will regard you as a lunatic, but if he should answer your query you will receive amazing answers. He will be able to tell you the names of rivers and mountains from China to Peru, he will rattle off the tributaries of the Ouse and the height of the Himalayas, he will be sure of those places on the earth that belong to the British Empire—but beyond that, nothing. Geography has for our Elementary Schools no social or historical significance; it is merely a matter of remembering names of places, as history is of remembering names of kings.

Throughout the child's course his education is conditioned by the system under which he and his teacher alike exist. And though constantly exerted pressure from Labour may, in time, clear away some of the worst.

abuses of class-controlled education, nothing of a radical nature can be accomplished until the domination of one class ceases. Education and educationalists will get their chance in the schools and Universities when there is no longer any need to train children to take their appointed places in industry, when the object of education is not to fit the youth of a nation for positions within a stereotyped class system. That day is not yet. In the meantime the significance of recent events in Russia merits close attention. The economic revolution in that country was followed immediately by a determined effort to capture the schools. Instead of the curriculum being moulded to suit the needs of Tsarism, it is now moulded to serve the needs of the Soviet form of society. Lenin is using the schools to inculcate the doctrines necessary for the continuance of Socialism, just as under the old régime they would have been used, had they existed, to secure the continuance of the old system. Now "revolutionary" doctrines and methods are above par, then those doctrines and methods were decidedly at a discount. The new system is attempting to redress the

balance of the old so that the coming generation of Russians will accept the Soviets as in the past the bulk of them were taught to accept the Tsar. Education in Russia to-day is one form of the Class Struggle.

The education of the child under the present system, then, is to be regarded as conditioned by that system and formed to secure its continuance. But there still remains the problem of the education of adults. Apart from the ordinary methods of adult education in Great Britain—continuation classes and schools, technical education and so forth—three attempts have been made to reach the adult worker—the Workers' Educational Association, Ruskin College and the Central Labour College. It is not my intention to deal with the history of these three movements, or to examine in any detail the results they have achieved. All that need concern us here is the question, "On what assumptions do these movements work, and how do these assumptions square with the fact of the Class Struggle?"

Ruskin College may be dismissed with very few words. Its main function is to train men to take up positions within the Trade.

Union Movement, and within its limits it succeeds. The fact that its headquarters are at Oxford is no accident, for the assumption upon which it works is that there exists something called "Culture," which can most easily be acquired on "the Banks of the Isis." It aims at giving to the students some of the advantages that are supposed to flow from an Oxford education, and prides itself upon the successes its students obtain in the examination for the Diploma of Political Economy and Science. It makes no pretence of training and equipping men for taking part in the struggle of the classes, nor are the fundamental dangers of the pursuit of a "culture" which can only be the culture of a class ever examined. From the point of view of those who regard the Class Struggle as the salient fact of civilisation Ruskin College is neither fowl, fish nor good red herring. It lacks independence, and so long as it remains at Oxford it will be stifled by the Oxford atmosphere. What that atmosphere is only those who have suffered it can say.

The Workers' Educational Association is a much more ambitious effort. In its origin

it is a humanitarian attempt to give to those deprived of opportunities in their youth an education that shall compare favourably with that enjoyed by the more fortunate and wealthy elements in society. It is "non-political and non-partisan," and draws support from all sections. Recognised by the Board of Education, assisted by great captains of industry, by Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, drawing its lecturers in the main from men and women of University education and often of great academic distinction, the W.E.A. seeks to fit the workers for the battle of life by widening their outlook and broadening their minds. Officially it knows nothing of the Class Struggle, officially it pursues "education, pure and simple," and in that pursuit calls upon the assistance of the best brains available. Officially, in short, it accepts the "view-point" that education is above the battle.

Fortunately for the W.E.A. its constitution leaves to the students a great amount of liberty. They can choose the subjects they desire to study, they can suggest the authorities that shall be consulted, they can choose their lecturers and generally manage

their own affairs. The value of this liberty is that, within the wide expanse of the Association, it is possible to get rid of the official view and to secure that the type of education given is more revolutionary than would meet with the approval of the Board of Education, of the Universities or of many of the supporters of the W.E.A. But this result is only obtained by throwing overboard the "non-political and non-partisan" character of the organisation—in other words, by giving up the pretence that education takes no sides. It is, indeed, just in those places where the official view has least hold that the W.E.A. succeeds in securing the support of the working-classes, and thereby in becoming an efficient instrument of working-class education. Places like the West Riding of Yorkshire, for instance, have managed to evade most of the regulations designed to keep the W.E.A. in the straight path, and the workers do control their own education. Elsewhere the story is different, and the dead hand of Capitalism is all-powerful.

More and more as time passes this struggle will grow keener between the official, view, with its desire to preserve good relations

with all sorts and conditions of men, with its close connection with the Universities and the Board of Education, and the unofficial view, with its insistence on the need for the workers to control their own education and no longer to be dependent, financially or morally, upon outside forces. The live elements in the W.E.A. are on the side of the latter view. Their success will mean the linking up of the W.E.A. with the Central Labour College, their failure will mean the entire capture of the W.E.A. by those who see in its work the best guarantee against revolution.

The third experiment in adult working-class education is based upon a belief in the need for the workers to control their own education and in that education's being concerned in the main with the position of the workers within society. The Central Labour College frankly seeks to harness education to the chariot of the Class Struggle; it has no use for "culture" when the culture is the product and child of a "master class"; it does not aim at fitting men and women for "the battle of life," or for holding responsible positions in Trade Unions—its one desire

is to equip men and women for the battle of classes and to endow them with a thorough knowledge of working-class economics, working-class philosophy and working-class history. Unlike the W.E.A., it is distinctly political and partisan.

Formed as the result of a strike by students at Ruskin College against the "bourgeois" influences of the place and the connection with the University of Oxford, the C.L.C., after a stormy passage, is now financed and controlled by the Unions. It draws, at the moment, its chief support from the South Wales Miners' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen, and the influence of its students and of its lecturers is most felt among these workers. But there are signs that the sway of the College is extending far beyond these limits, and no one who wishes to understand the forces that are making for a revolution in this country can afford to ignore its work. Its ideal is independent working-class education free from the control or interference of all Universities, State authorities or philanthropists, its method is to spread a knowledge of Marxian economics and Marxian philosophy by means

of tutorial classes in industrial districts and of a course for special students in London. It is polemical in the manner of expressing its views, and it pursues the creation of "a class-conscious proletariat" with deadly earnestness. Those who are not for it are against it, and for "the wobbler" there is short shrift.

Closely allied with the C.L.C. is the Plebs League, a propaganda organisation devoted to spreading the gospel of independent education wherever any one can be found to listen, or wherever any one will buy its organ, *The Plebs Magazine*. The League, like the College, is uncompromising in its hostility to other schemes for educating the workers—schemes that to its members are but "dodges of the Capitalist class to nobble the proletariat." In season and out of season it carries on its work, and the fruits can be seen in every district in England, Scotland and Wales.

There can, I believe, be no question that the future is with the C.L.C. The very fact that it is built upon the basis of the Class Struggle and is concerned solely with fitting the workers to wage that struggle

and, after the struggle is over, to consolidate the victory, ensures its success. It is marching with the times and not against them; it is in line with events as they unfold themselves in Capitalist countries, and it has seen that the only education that can be of service to the workers is an education that gives to them a grasp of their own position in society and an understanding of their mission.

That the C.L.C. is open to the charge of narrowness and bigotry, no one will deny, but rightly viewed such a charge is the greatest praise that can be given. Analyse the charge and it will be found to mean that the C.L.C. refuses to turn aside from the business of making the workers realise that "the rich will do everything for the poor except get off their backs." Greater praise no working-class movement could secure. At the same time it would be absurd to overlook the defects of the C.L.C. Its very insistence upon the need for a biased education tends to give to its lecturers, and through them to its students, a curiously academic view of life. "Teach the workers," they seem to say, "the pure and undefiled

gospel of Marxism, make them understand the real meaning of Economic Determinism, and all will be well." But the secret of education surely lies in the power to relate what is learnt in the class-rooms to what happens in the streets. To know Marx backwards and forwards may lead to a man's becoming an active and intelligent force for revolution; equally it may produce a prig of the worst possible type, who, faced with a problem of actual life, seeks its solution by an appeal to *Das Kapital*, as Calvinists appeal to the Bible. Having quoted the necessary phrase, sentence or chapter, our Marxian haughtily leaves the actual problem unsolved and retires in good order. I am sometimes afraid that the present régime at the C.L.C. is more apt to turn out the latter type than the former.

The need of the workers in education is not only that they should understand their position as workers, but that they should know how to apply that understanding. Education has its practical bearings. Education has its practical side just as revolutions have their tactical lessons. What the C.L.C. most needs, if it is to become a really fruitful

seed-ground for revolutionaries, is that it should give more attention to the creation not only of men who understand, but of men who can act. To learn *how* to achieve the revolution is as vital as to understand *why* the revolution must come. The "why" of things the C.L.C. teaches, the "*how*" it is in danger of forgetting.

This twofold education of the workers forms one of the most potent weapons for waging the Class Struggle, and only by the C.L.C. has this fact been grasped. That there is room for development the keenest admirers of the College will readily admit, but the point that is of value here and now, is that the assumptions underlying its work are based not upon the supposed existence of a universal culture, not upon a theory that education is "above the battle," not upon a philanthropic desire to help the workers, but upon a conviction that the need of the workers is to learn the facts of their own history and to secure an understanding of working-class problems from the workers' point of view. Knowledge is power, and the power the C.L.C. seeks is the power to overthrow Capitalism.

IX

THE APPROACH

IN previous chapters I have dealt with the philosophy that lies behind the advocacy of direct action, and have outlined some of the practical consequences springing from an acceptance of that philosophy. It would be foolish to ignore the fact that neither the philosophy nor the consequences have as yet been realised by the Labour Movement of this country. Here and there will be found groups of workers who consciously strive to awaken their comrades to the full meaning of the Class War, and who seek every opportunity of pressing home the lesson of history. These groups are few in number, but their effect far outweighs their numerical strength. They are the leaven at work within the Trade Unions. Nor is their success slight. . . .

Before the European War the idea of using the industrial power of the organised

working-class to secure objects more fundamental than increases of wages or shorter hours was regarded as Utopian folly at the best, and treason to the democracy at the worst. Nowadays it is the commonest thing in the world of Labour to find Trade Union branches calling upon their Executives to use the strike to gain objects that in the old days were looked upon as the business of politicians, and that were to be gained only at the polls. Peace or war, private or public ownership of great basic industries, the abolition of profiteering in foodstuffs, the release of political prisoners—all these things are now regarded as legitimate causes for the use of direct action. True, those who pass the resolutions are often not very clear as to why they do so, but this only means that the pressure of events has outstripped their power to interpret or understand them. They realise that some action has got to be taken; they have come to distrust the efficacy of the political weapon, and instinctively fall back upon that refusal to work that has served them well in the past when lesser interests were at stake. The British working-class is becoming direct-

actionist not because it wants to, but because it cannot help itself. Crises arise that call for instant action. Politics is a slow business; the strike is swift. Councils of Action arise, and these Councils, by their very existence, create the psychology of action on which the success of direct action depends. They know little about the fundamental facts of the Class War, but they see the Government doing things they do not like—and they want to put an end to it. How? And the answer comes, "Let's strike."

Without a philosophy, without a coherent aim, ill co-ordinated and frowned upon by the Constitutionalists, the movement for direct action is growing. Events themselves will compel the workers to co-ordinate their activities, to adopt a philosophy and consciously to labour to end wage-slavery. The workers are instinctively turning to direct action, and this instinct will triumph over the old traditions and constitutional ways.

Immediately after the Armistice, when the miners met to formulate their demands (January 1919), they included as one of the

four heads of their programme "nationalisation of all mines and minerals." In February they took a ballot on the question of a strike to enforce their demands, and the voting resulted in a majority of five to one in favour of direct action. The effects were immediate, and at once the Prime Minister offered a Coal Commission, to report on wages, hours, and nationalisation. The miners took the offer in good faith, waited patiently for the report, found their claims approved by a majority of the Commission, and then realised that the Government was prepared to repudiate its own Commission.

At the Trades Union Congress held at Glasgow, September 10, 1919, the miners, in consequence of what they regarded as Government treachery, put forward a resolution asking for the co-operation of the Congress "with a view to compelling the Government to adopt the scheme of national ownership and joint control recommended by the majority of the Coal Commission in their Report." The resolution also provided for a Special Congress to be convened, "for the purpose of deciding the form of

action to be taken to compel the Government to accept the Majority Report of the Commission." The Congress accepted the resolution by a vote of 4,478,000 to 77,000, a majority of more than four millions, and rightly this vote was regarded as a triumph for the idea of direct action. The Trades Union Congress was pledged "to compel" the Government, and its only weapon was the strike.

Immediately a campaign was started in the country to weaken this resolve, and "to bring back the Trade Unionists to the sane paths of Constitutionalism." Practically the whole Press of the country was mobilised for this purpose, and for weeks on end the workers were appealed to in the name of "patriotism" and "democracy." The appeals were not without effect, and the results were made manifest in March 1920, when the time came for the Special Congress of the whole movement to meet for its final decision.

On January 9, 1920, the Executive of the Miners' Federation decided to call a Special Conference of the Federation, to which the delegates should come "instructed to say

whether or not, we should propose at the Special Trades Union Congress a general Trade Union strike in the event of the Government continuing to refuse to nationalise the mines."

This Conference took place on March 10, 1920, and the vote was as follows:-

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| For industrial action | 524,000 |
| For political action | 346,000. |

The Special Trades Union Congress was held in London on March 11, 1920, and the vote on the form of action to be taken "to compel the Government" resulted in a majority of 2,717,000 for "political" action, and a majority of 2,820,000 against "industrial" action.

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| For political action | 3,732,000 |
| Against | 1,015,000. |

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| For Trade Union action | 1,050,000 |
| Against | 3,870,000. |

The pendulum had swung back and "sanity" had triumphed. The consequences of this reversal of policy cannot yet be estimated, for even as I write the strike

notices of the miners are running out. They demand an increase in wages; they have been driven to ask for this very largely "because the rest of the Labour Movement failed to support them at a crisis." Wages, strikes are the inevitable result of continued private ownership.

There can, I think, be little doubt that before long the demand for direct action to secure the national ownership of the mines will again be raised, and perhaps this time, from motives of self-preservation, Labour will help the miners. If they do not, then the responsibility for a continuance of the vicious circle of wages and prices will rest largely upon the shoulders of those upon whom the effects are more serious. A partial realisation of this is at the back of the much more successful movement for direct action to secure peace with Russia. The workers do not like the idea of Britain interfering in the internal organisation of another country, they distrust the Capitalist influences at work behind the scenes, but equally they believe that Russia is a storehouse of grain, and that given peace the cost of living will go down. For a mixture

of motives they seem to be united for the one purpose of securing peace. It has taken nearly eighteen months for this feeling to be consolidated, but it has been done.

At Southport, on April 16, 1919, a conference of the Triple Alliance passed a resolution urging the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress—

“to convene, at the earliest possible date, a special National Conference of the Trade Union Movement, so as to enable the affiliated societies to decide what action, if any, should be taken to compel the Government to comply with any, or all, of the terms of the resolution as passed at the League of Nations Conference, the terms of which are set out as follows—

“The withdrawal of the Conscription Bill now before Parliament.

“The withdrawal of all British troops from Russia.

“The release of all C.O.’s now in prison.

“The raising of the blockade.”

As a result of this decision, the Government began to “climb down,” and in May

Mr. Bonar Law persuaded the Parliamentary Committee that direct action was "unnecessary." In the same month, however, a further political question was brought before the Trade Union Movement by the publication in *The Daily Herald* of the "Secret Circular" which had been issued by the War Office to Commanding Officers in order to obtain information as to whether troops would "assist in strike-breaking." The three branches of the Triple Alliance—the Miners' Federation, the National Union of Railwaymen, and the Transport Workers' Federation—each held a Conference in June, and at each protests were raised against the inactivity of the Parliamentary Committee, while the demand that the Army should not be used for strike-breaking was added to the four previous ones.

At the end of the month the Labour Party, the political expression of the workers, met in full Conference, and carried the following resolution by a majority of almost a million—(1,893,000 to 935,000)—

"This Conference protests against the continued intervention by the Allies in

Russia, whether by force of arms, by supply of munitions, by financial subsidies, or by commercial blockade. It calls for the immediate cessation of such intervention.

"It demands the removal of the Censorship so that an unbiased public opinion may be formed upon the issues involved."

"It denounces the assistance given by the Allies to reactionary bodies in Russia as being a continuation of the war in the interests of financial Capitalism, which aims at the destruction of the Russian Socialist Republic, and as being a denial of the rights of people to self-determination.

"And it instructs the National Executive to consult the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress with a view to effective action being taken to enforce these demands by the unreserved use of their political and industrial power."

In July, while the Government rapidly completed the release of the conscientious objectors, the Triple Alliance again met, and, by a vote of 217 to 11, censured the inaction of the Parliamentary Committee, and recommended a ballot of their members

on the strike question. In less than a week after this decision Mr. Churchill announced that all British troops would be withdrawn from North Russia by the end of the summer, and no further troops sent to any part of Russia. This pledge being accepted, no ballot was taken. But when the Trades Union Congress met, in September, the paragraph in the Annual Report in which the Parliamentary Committee excused its lack of activity was "referred back" by 2,586,000 votes to 1,876,000—in other words, the Committee was censured by a majority of 710,000.

The months which followed the meeting of the Congress were marked by a steady rise in the determination of the workers to put an end to the war with Russia, and by an equally steady, though secret, determination on the part of the Government—on sections of it—to use every means to destroy the power of the Soviet Government. Matters came to a head in April 1920, when the Polish offensive—long secretly planned, and supported by France and Great Britain—was launched. Vessels laden with guns and aeroplanes were leaving this country for

Poland, and though every one knew that aid was being sent, so as to secure victory for the Polish forces, the stream of questions in the House of Commons was successfully resisted by the Government. On May 6 Major Mackenzie Wood asked the Prime Minister whether the Allies, or any one of them, was giving moral or material support to Poland in her attack on Russia. "The answer is in the negative," replied Mr. Bonar Law. On the same day *The Daily Herald* published the information that the *Jolly George*, lying in East India Dock, was being loaded with munitions for Warsaw. On May 10 the dockers refused to work any longer on the *Jolly George*. On May 17 Mr. Bonar Law admitted that the British Government had "offered to supply a certain quantity of surplus stores" to Poland, and Sir Robert Horne at last contrived to remember that the Government had issued an export licence for the "munitions of war" intended for transport on the *Jolly George*.

Immediately after this episode, the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union, meeting in triennial conference at

Plymouth, passed by acclamation a resolution congratulating the London members on "refusing to have their labour prostituted for this purpose," so calling upon "the whole of the movement to resist their labour being used to perpetuate these wicked ventures."

Across the Channel at this same moment, Irish railwaymen were refusing to work a train carrying military stores from Kingstown.¹ Their action was followed by the

¹ One of the most effective instances of direct action known to history was provided in the following spring by Ireland. In April last there were in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, one hundred political prisoners, who, by the Government's own admission, had either been excluded from the ameliorative treatment due to political prisoners, or else had not been tried at all. These men had been on hunger-strike for eight days, and were nearing death. Dublin Castle had issued, in the previous November, a public notification that "prisoners who resort to hunger-striking will not in any circumstances, be released from prison either unconditionally or conditionally." Announcements were made from the Castle and in the House of Commons that this edict stood unchanged.

On the eighth day, the Executive of the Irish Trades Union Congress called a general strike throughout the country for the next day. "You are called upon to act swiftly and suddenly to save one hundred dauntless men," ran the manifesto. The strike took place at less than twenty-four hours' notice, and even the Capitalist newspapers could not deny its completeness. Late on the evening of the second day, the prisoners were released.

other Irish members of the N.U.R., and the Executive, which had at first recommended its members to refuse to handle munitions for Poland, found itself up against the more difficult problem of Ireland. It became clear that the matter must be treated by the Trade Union Movement as a whole.

At the instance of the Triple Alliance, the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress summoned a Special Conference, held at the Central Hall, Westminster on July 13, 1920, to determine the policy of the Trade Unions on the Irish and Russian questions. The following resolution, put forward by the Miners' Federation, was carried by a card vote of 2,760,000 to 1,636,000—

“That this Congress protests against the British military domination of Ireland, and demands the withdrawal of all British troops from that country, and demands the cessation of the production of munitions of war, destined to be used against Ireland and Russia, and, in case the Government refuses these demands, we recommend a general down-tools policy, and call upon all the

Trade Unions here represented to carry out this policy, each according to its own constitution, by taking a ballot of its members or otherwise."

Two days before, on July 11, at Glasgow, the Scottish Trades Union Congress passed, with only two dissentient votes, a resolution calling on its affiliated organisations "to refuse to manufacture, handle and transport munitions, or to transport troops, for the purpose of repression in Ireland."

Meanwhile the Polish offensive had at first been successful, and both the Allied Governments and the League of Nations had refused to intervene for peace. But on July 11, when the Red Army was practically master of the situation, Lord Curzon suddenly demanded from the Soviet Government an armistice for Poland on a line chosen by the Allies, a London Conference "under the auspices of the Allies," to arrange the peace terms, and an armistice for General Wrangel. For another month the Allies continued to direct and to delay the Polish negotiations, while the French General Staff directed the Polish Army.

On August 4 Mr. Lloyd George interviewed the Russian delegates in London and declared that Great Britain would aid Poland unless the advance of the Red Armies immediately stopped. The next day, Arthur Henderson, as Secretary of the Labour Party, warned all local Labour organisations that there was grave danger of war. On August 9, a Joint Conference of the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party was held at the House of Commons, and the following resolution, calling into being the Council of Action, was passed—

“That this Joint Conference, representing the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party, feel certain that war is being engineered between the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia on the issue of Poland, and declares that such a war would be an intolerable crime against humanity; *it therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war.*

“That the Executive Committees of affiliated organisations throughout the country

be summoned to hold themselves ready to proceed immediately to London for a National Conference.

"That they be advised to instruct their members to 'down tools' on instructions from that National Conference.

"And that a Council of Action be immediately constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect."

On the same day, the Allied Governments, conferring at Lymington, announced that they were "in complete agreement regarding the action to be taken," including "certain naval measures."

On August 10 the Council of Action interviewed Mr. Lloyd George, who promised a "reassuring" statement in the House of Commons. In effect, however, this statement in the evening was a threat against Russia, and one of the threatened weapons was the blockade.

On August 13 the National Labour Conference, summoned by the Council of Action, met at the Central Hall, Westminster. There were present 1,044 delegates, of whom 889

represented Trade Unions and 355 represented local Labour Parties and Trades Councils. The following resolution was unanimously carried—

“The Trade Union and Labour Movement hails with satisfaction the Russian Government’s declaration in favour of the complete independence of Poland as set forth in its peace terms to Poland, and realising the gravity of the international situation, pledges itself to resist any and every form of military and naval intervention against the Soviet Government of Russia.

“The Council of Action is therefore instructed to remain in being until it has secured—

- “(1) An absolute guarantee that the armed forces of Great Britain shall not be used in support of Poland, Baron Wrangel, or any other military or naval effort against the Soviet Government.
- “(2) The withdrawal of all British naval forces operating directly or indirectly as a blockading influence against Russia.

"(3) The recognition of the Russian Soviet Government and the establishment of unrestricted trading and commercial relationships between Great Britain and Russia.

"The Labour Movement further refuses to be associated with any Alliance between Great Britain and France, or any other country, which commits us to any support of Wrangel, Poland, or the supply of munitions or other war material for any form of attack upon Soviet Russia.

"The Council of Action is authorised to call for any and every form of withdrawal of Labour which circumstances may require to give effect to the foregoing policy, and calls upon every Trade Union official, Executive Committee, Local Council of Action, and the membership in general to act swiftly, loyally and courageously, in order to sweep away secret diplomacy, and to ensure that the foreign policy of Great Britain may be in accord with the well-known desires of the people for an end to war and the interminable threats of war."

As I write, the Council of Action is still in session. The military situation has changed,

Russia, for the moment, has received a setback, and the circumstances calling for direct action remain. For the first time in the history of the Labour Movement there is a body in existence with power to act. Executives have surrendered their autonomy, they have sunk all petty jealousies for the one end; throughout the country a network of local councils exists, and the cadre of the Soviet form of organisation is in existence. I dare not prophesy, for with the British Labour Movement the "swing of the pendulum" may destroy all that has been created. But at least this much has been achieved: on an issue hitherto regarded as political, as outside the sphere of economic action, the whole movement—constitutionalists and revolutionaries alike—has come together on the platform of direct action. In the words of that super-constitutionalist, J. H. Thomas, "the basis of the constitution has been attacked," and from that there can be no receding. The battle of direct actionists within the Labour Movement on one issue at least has been won. So it will, in the end, be won on all the other issues.

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